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JOURNEY OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

A Dissertation
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education
in
Educational Leadership

by
Rosa Olivia Rosas
March 2020

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

Access to U.S. higher education for undocumented students has been challenging over the years despite recent legislative and organizational changes that have afforded some the opportunity to enroll in post-secondary institutions (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Juárez, 2017; Pérez, 2010). Of the approximately 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from high schools across the country every year, only 7,000-13,000 enroll in post-secondary institutions annually (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012; Muñoz, 2013). However, most recent data reveal that an estimated 98,000 undocumented students graduate from high schools across the country every year (Zong & Batalova, 2019). Despite these challenges, undocumented students are resilient and have high educational aspirations. The purpose of this study was to explore the role an Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC) plays in the college journey of undocumented students. The research questions that guided the study were: 1) How does an USRC at a four-year, public, comprehensive university influence the experiences of undocumented students, if at all?; 2) What strategies does an USRC implement to support undocumented students, if any?; and 3) How does an USRC influence the persistence of undocumented students, if at all?. Using an intrinsic case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participant observations. Although there are studies that have focused on the experiences of undocumented students in higher education, there is limited research on Undocumented Student Resource

Centers (USRCs) and the role they play in student success. Accordingly, the purpose of this intrinsic case study was to explore the role of an USRC and its influence in the college journey of undocumented students at Westside University (WU). The six major interrelated themes constructed from the data included: 1) Facilitating College Access; 2) Breaking Down Barriers; 3) Alleviating Fear; 4) Fostering Acompañamiento; 5) Promoting Agency and Advocacy; and 6) Advancing Post-Baccalaureate Education and Career Choice.

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DEDICATION

Para Diosito porque sin él, no soy nadie. Quiero darle gracias a mi Papá, Jesus “El Chuma” por habernos traído a este país. Yo sé que aunque él no está con nosotros, él me sigue bendiciendo desde el cielo. Quiero expresar mi gratitud a mi Mamá, Rosa (mi Ángel en la tierra) por su amor incondicional. Ella es quien me ha dado su apoyo, su ejemplo, y la determinación de nunca darme por vencida. I got it from my Momma.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

According to Pérez et al. (2010), many undocumented students have to deal with a “triple minority status,” encompassing ethnic origin, lack of documentation, and economic disadvantages (p. 39). Given numerous systemic barriers, the families of undocumented students often live below the poverty level, making it more challenging for undocumented students to succeed (Morrison et al., 2016). Undocumented immigrant youth who are economically disadvantaged are limited by social injustices, which have a negative impact on their educational experiences (Borjian, 2016). For instance, low-income undocumented families often live in crowded apartments, feel unsafe in their neighborhoods, and are exposed to poor educational conditions and violence in their schools (Abrego, 2006; Pérez et al., 2010). Moreover, the legal status of their family members, which are often mixed status (Fix & Zimmerman, 2001), discourages them in ways that do not apply to documented students (Abrego, 2006).

Consequently, access to U.S. higher education for undocumented students has been challenging over the years despite recent legislative and organizational changes that have afforded some the opportunity to enroll in post-secondary institutions (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Juárez, 2017; Pérez, 2010). Similar to the challenges faced by their documented Latino peers, including low

income status, poor quality schools, and parents' limited knowledge of the U.S. educational system, undocumented students encounter additional obstacles as they move through the educational pipeline due to their immigration status (Chavez, Soriano & Olivérez, 2007; Jacobo & Ochoa, 2011; Murillo, 2017). Despite these challenges, undocumented students are resilient and have high educational aspirations.

The literature on undocumented students demonstrates that navigating college can be a daunting and complex process (Olivérez, 2006; Pérez, 2010). Of the approximately 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from high schools across the country every year (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012; Muñoz, 2013), only 7,000-13,000 enroll in post-secondary institutions annually (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012). Most recent estimates indicate that there are 98,000 undocumented immigrants graduating from high schools across the country annually (Zong & Batalova, 2019) with over forty percent of these students residing in California and Texas. The majority of these students have lived in the United States most of their lives because they were brought to this country at a young age (Immigrants Rising, n.d.). Accordingly, many have attended U.S. schools their entire lives, learned English, and excelled academically (Immigrants Rising, n.d.). Nonetheless, college is still very much an opportunity that is out of reach (Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Ruge & Iza, 2005; Terriquez, 2015). Although legislative strides have been made over the past decade (Hsin & Ortega, 2018), undocumented students are still prevented from

gaining legal status and fully contributing to society and the economy by excluding them from attending college and securing better paying jobs (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Terriquez, 2015; Varela, 2011).

Problem Statement

Most of the existing literature on undocumented students points to the experiences that students have encountered through their educational trajectory. These include the challenges and opportunities they encounter in the K-12 and post-secondary systems. Correspondingly, the literature also reveals the importance of services aimed specifically at assisting undocumented students succeed including greater access to higher education (Pérez & Rodriguez, 2012), information on financial aid, social and psychological support (Chen, Budianto, & Wong, 2010; Pérez, 2010), and institutional commitment (Pérez & Rodriguez, 2012).

Considering the barriers encountered by undocumented students as they enroll in and navigate post-secondary education, and the limited research on Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs), this intrinsic case study explored the role of an USRC in undocumented students' experiences and persistence as they navigated their college journey at a four-year, public, comprehensive institution. This study was designed to contribute to existing literature and fill some of the gaps by providing recommendations and practices institutions can employ to assist undocumented students succeed.

Purpose Statement

Although there are studies that have focused on the experiences of undocumented students in higher education, there is limited research on Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs) and the role they play in student success. Accordingly, the purpose of this intrinsic case study was to explore the role of an USRC and its influence in the college journey of undocumented students at Westside University (WU). Guided by Undocumented Critical Theory (UndocuCrit), this study aimed to contribute to the existing but limited literature on USRCs, identify strategies colleges and universities can employ to support undocumented students, and provide valuable insights for colleges and universities to plan and establish or (re)design Undocumented Student Resource Centers. Lastly, this study intended to identify recommendations for future research to further support the undocumented student population.

Research Questions

As noted previously, the overall purpose of this intrinsic case study was to explore the role of an Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC) and its influence in the college journey of undocumented students at Westside University (WU). The three research questions that guided this case study were:

1. How does an USRC at a four-year, public, comprehensive university influence the experiences of undocumented students, if at all?

2. What strategies does an USRC implement to support undocumented students, if any?
3. How does an USRC influence the persistence of undocumented students if at all?

Significance of the Study

As mentioned previously, this study contributes to existing literature on the role of an Undocumented Student Resource Center and its influence on the college journey of undocumented students. In light of the number of obstacles undocumented students have to overcome to earn a college degree, this study provides valuable insights for colleges and universities to establish or (re)design Undocumented Student Resource Centers. In addition, the results of this study may be utilized to develop trainings, secure resources, and provide a welcoming college environment where students can thrive (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018). Finally, this study offers recommendations for colleges and universities to consider as they look for ways to create practices to help undocumented students successfully matriculate, remain in school, and graduate (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018; Pérez, 2010). As the undocumented student population continues to grow, it is increasingly important that university leaders and educators be able to utilize existing literature and the findings in this study in their decision-making process in support of undocumented students and their success.

Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by Undocumented Critical Theory (UndocuCrit). UndocuCrit is a developing theory advanced by Aguilar (2018) and influenced by Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit), and Tribal Critical Race Theory (Tribal Crit). Aguilar (2018) introduced UndocuCrit to gain a better understanding of the “nuanced and liminal experiences that characterize undocumented communities in the United States” (p. 152). To fully understand UndocuCrit, an overview of CRT and CRT in education, in particular, is needed.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the early 1970s in the legal profession and as an academic movement with the writings of Derrick Bell, an attorney and the first African American to teach at Harvard Law School (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). CRT was first introduced as an analytical framework to assess educational inequities in 1994 (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Crenshaw (2010), revisits the history of CRT highlighting discourses of race and racism. In addition, CRT has grown to be a comprehensive and cross-disciplinary analytical framework, including the field of education (Solórzano, 1998). For example, CRT has been used to study racial microaggressions and campus racial climate (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), academic resources available on campus for students of color (Teranishi, Allen, & Solórzano, 2004), and college choice (Acevedo-Gil, 2015).

According to Solórzano (1998), Critical Race Theory in education “challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education

by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 122). Taken together, CRT is a social justice lens that works against racism within K-12 and higher education (Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, 2005). Similarly, the components of Undocumented Critical Theory (UndocuCrit) align with those of CRT. Aguilar (2018) summarized the main tenets of UndocuCrit as follows:

1. Fear is endemic among immigrant communities: The premise that race and racism are prevalent in society and that racist immigration legislation and practices build fear among undocumented immigrants.
2. Different experiences of liminality translate into different experiences of reality: Undocumented immigrants’ experiences are not homogeneous. It is necessary to value and capture the realities of undocumented immigrants adequately.
3. Parental *sacrificios* become a form of capital: The belief that in spite of low socioeconomic status, limited educational attainment and immigration challenges, parents of undocumented students provide support, motivation and love, which encourages them to succeed academically.
4. *Acompañamiento* is the embodiment of mentorship, academic redemption, and community engagement: The concept of *acompañar* (to join/take journey with) undocumented students in their school trajectory and embraced by communities in the creation of knowledge (Aguilar, 2018, p. 157).

Assumptions

This study included the following assumptions: (1) self-identified undocumented students are in fact undocumented; (2) the study participants responded to interview questions candidly and truthfully; (3) immigration policies have a negative impact on undocumented students' lives, including educational experiences and outcomes; and (4) Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs) help this student population navigate college.

Limitations

The participants' immigration status was based on self-disclosure or self-identification and this may be viewed as a limitation of the study. For both ethical and personal concerns, I did not ask students to confirm their undocumented status. In addition, for purposes of this study, I did not differentiate between DACA and unDACAmented students. Finally, of the fourteen students who participated in the study, only two were male.

Delimitations

The study's main purpose was to explore the role an Undocumented Student Resource Center plays in the college journey of undocumented students. It was not intended to evaluate the services it provides.

Summary

This case study intended to explore the role an Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC) plays in the college journey of undocumented students

at Westside University (WU). In this introductory chapter, I provided an overview of the barriers and opportunities undocumented students encounter when accessing higher education. I also presented the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions that guided the study, and provided the rationale of why the study is important. Lastly, I reviewed the conceptual framework that guided the study, as well as its assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. In the following chapter, I synthesize the literature related to undocumented students and their experiences.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Access to U.S. higher education for undocumented students has been elusive, controversial, and challenging over the years. Although recent legislative and organizational changes have afforded some undocumented students the opportunity to attend post-secondary institutions, these students remain marginalized and face greater obstacles than U.S. citizens and other legal residents (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Juárez, 2017; Mangual Figueroa, 2017). In this chapter, I provide a general overview of the undocumented student population and illustrate the different legislations at the federal and state level, which have affected undocumented students. I also identify some of the challenges faced by the undocumented student population as well as highlight their educational experiences. Finally, I present various opportunities available to undocumented students to pursue their educational goals and the various ways in which colleges and universities can and have supported undocumented students. Given the purpose of this study, I draw particular attention to Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs).

A Profile of Undocumented Students in the United States

According to the National Immigration Law Center (n.d.), an undocumented immigrant is someone born outside of the United States (U.S.)

who may have entered the country on a visa but overstayed its timeframe; or someone who came to this country with fraudulent documentation or no documentation at all.

The undocumented community accounts for a large portion of the U.S. population (Morrison et al., 2016). In 2016, roughly 24% of the U.S. foreign-born population or 10.7 million people were undocumented immigrants, representing 3.3% of the entire U.S. population; a decline from 12.2 million in 2007 (López, Bialik & Radford, 2018). This decline is primarily due to a decrease in the number of undocumented or unauthorized immigrants coming from Mexico (López et al., 2018). At the same time, the U.S. has experienced an increase in unauthorized populations from Central America, Asia, and Africa (López et al., 2018; Rosenblum & Ruiz Soto, 2015). Of the previously estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, 15% were between 16 to 24 years of age (Migration Policy Institute, 2012). According to Morrison, et al., (2016) an estimated 5.5 million children under the age of 18 live in an undocumented household and roughly, 1.5 million undocumented school-aged children live in the United States.

Undocumented families and students have multiple reasons for immigrating to the United States (Berger-Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Ruge & Iza, 2005; Valdez, Valentine & Padilla, 2013). Families are often times looking for work opportunities, to (re)unite with family, or leave a country that is in turmoil (Casas & Cabrera, 2011; Hagelskamp, Suárez-Orozco & Hughes, 2010; Ruge &

Iza, 2005). Although work opportunities are limited, extensive research has shown that undocumented families make significant contributions to the U.S. economy through their employment and the taxes they pay (Kosten, 2018; Ruge & Iza, 2005). As such, “the removal of undocumented workers would represent a major loss for the U.S. economy” (Kosten, 2018, p. 3). In addition to economic contributions, which are neglected often in the anti-immigration discourse, undocumented families contribute to the cultural richness of the U.S. through their artistic, culinary, athletic, linguistic, and scientific brilliance (Hirschman, 2013; McCarthy, 2018).

Given numerous systemic barriers, which I will discuss throughout this review of the literature, the families of undocumented students often live below the poverty level, making it more challenging for undocumented students to succeed (Morrison et al., 2016). According to Pérez, et al., (2010), many undocumented students have to deal with a “triple minority status,” encompassing ethnic origin, lack of documentation, and economic disadvantages (p. 39). Undocumented immigrant youth who are economically disadvantaged are limited by social injustices, which have a negative impact on their educational experiences (Borjian, 2016). For example, low-income undocumented families often live in crowded apartments, feel unsafe in their neighborhoods, and are exposed to poor educational conditions and violence in their schools (Abrego, 2006; Pérez et al., 2010). Moreover, the legal status of their family members,

which are often mixed status (Fix & Zimmerman, 2001), discourages them in ways that do not apply to documented students (Abrego, 2006).

Despite social, economic, and political marginalization experienced by undocumented families (Muñoz, 2013; Pérez, et al., 2010; Rodriguez Vega, 2018), approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high schools across the country every year (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012; Muñoz, 2013). The majority of undocumented students have lived in the United States most of their lives because they were brought to this country at a young age (Immigrants Rising, n.d.). Accordingly, many undocumented students attended U.S. schools their entire lives, learned English, and excelled academically (Immigrants Rising, n.d.). Of the 65,000 students, between 7,000 - 13,000 enroll in post-secondary institutions every year (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012; Muñoz, 2013). Most recent data reveal that an estimated 98,000 undocumented students graduate from high schools across the country every year (Zong & Batalova, 2019). Nonetheless, college is still very much an opportunity that is out of reach (Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Ruge & Iza, 2005; Terriquez, 2015). Although legislative strides have been made over the past decade (Hsin & Ortega, 2018), undocumented students are still prevented from gaining legal status and fully contributing to society and the economy by excluding them from attending college and securing better paying jobs (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Terriquez, 2015; Varela, 2011).

Legislation and Immigration Policy

Current federal and state immigration policies do not adequately address the needs of undocumented students specifically as it relates to post-secondary education (Anaya, del Rosario & Hayes-Bautista, 2014; Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-Hajbi, & Wilkerson, 2010; Jacobo & Ochoa, 2011). Although the children of undocumented immigrant families are able to attend U.S. public schools at no cost from elementary to high school, they find themselves in a quandary because this protection does not extend to post-secondary education (Pérez et al., 2010; Ruge & Iza, 2005). In addition, the children of immigrant families are affected by laws and educational policies even when immigration status is not the focus. For example, in 1998, California passed Proposition 227, which dismantled most bilingual education in the state and made English the required language of instruction known as the intensive English-immersion program (Kinney, 2018). After nearly twenty years since the implementation of Proposition 227, California repealed it and restored bilingual education by approving by majority vote, Proposition 58. This new law implements the California Multilingual Education Act of 2016. Proposition 58 gives California public schools more control over dual language programs (Hopkinson, 2017) and requires school districts to discuss their English learner programs with stakeholders including parents and community members (Hopkinson, 2016). Nonetheless, undocumented students' ability to participate in and receive a free K-12 education was not always the case. In this section, I review legislation enacted in relation to undocumented

students and education including Plyer v. Doe, DREAM ACT, AB540, and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

PLYLER V. DOE

Prior to Plyer v. Doe (1982), undocumented students were denied access to public K-12 education. In 1982, the U.S. Supreme court struck down the 1975 Texas law, which denied undocumented immigrant children a free K-12 public education by charging them tuition to attend state schools (Flores, 2010). The United States Supreme Court ruled that undocumented children could attend K-12 public schools without regard to their immigration status (Olivas, 2012). Justice William Brennan's decision held that while undocumented students' immigration status was important it was not to define children's K-12 schooling. This decision left local, state, and county governments with no authority to exclude against undocumented children who were brought to this country by their parents (Olivas, 2012).

The benefit of a free education, however, does not extend beyond high school (Gonzales, 2011). Without financial assistance, the cost of attending college can be out of reach for many undocumented students and their families (Abrego, 2006). As such, many undocumented students who are college eligible do not pursue higher education (Pérez et al., 2010). Although some states grant in-state tuition to undocumented students, others do not; however, more states are introducing legislation to provide in-state tuition to this student population (Ali, 2017). At the same time, offering financial aid in the form of in-state tuition to

undocumented students is insufficient (Conger & Chellman, 2013). The following legislation overview focuses on the DREAM ACT.

DREAM ACT

There have been efforts at the federal level to bring a uniform process to address the naturalization of undocumented students. One example is the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) introduced in 2001 but failed to pass (Huaman, 2017). Several attempts have been made to enact it as a law since then with no success (Huaman, 2017). This proposed legislation would have provided a pathway for undocumented students who met certain criteria to gain lawful immigration status in the United States, be able to legally work, and be eligible for state and federal financial aid (Ruge & Iza 2005). Since then, the Senate and House of Representatives have introduced variations of the original DREAM Act. However, despite bipartisan support for this legislation, it has failed to pass through Congress (American Immigration Council, 2017).

Currently, twenty states, including California, which has the largest undocumented student population (López et al., 2018), have adopted their own version of the Dream ACT to help undocumented youth overcome challenges to access higher education (National Immigration Law Center, 2018). During the same year that the DREAM ACT was introduced and rejected, California Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540) was signed into law (Negrón-Gonzales, 2017). Conversely, states such as Arizona, Georgia, and Indiana have passed

legislation that prohibits undocumented students from paying in-state tuition. Alabama and South Carolina do not allow undocumented students to pursue a post-secondary education at any public institution (Soria & Shaikh, 2019).

ASSEMBLY BILL 540 (AB540)

As noted previously, California and other states extend undocumented students the benefit of paying in-state tuition at public colleges and universities (Negrón-Gonzalez, 2017). AB 540 has been described as law that grants any student not only undocumented students who meet specific criteria to pay in-state tuition making college more accessible to this population (Abrego, 2008; Olivérez, Chavez, Soriano, & Tierney, 2006).

Abrego (2008) analyzed the legal consciousness of undocumented students and the intended and unintended outcomes of AB 540. In this five-year longitudinal case study, Abrego (2008) also explored the participants' belief in meritocracy and how it connects with the law. The findings in the study showed that the passage of AB 540 had immediate benefits for undocumented students in that it empowered them to mobilize and relieved the stigma associated with their status. The participants were undocumented students at various colleges and universities in the United States. The study involved participant observations and consisted of interviews with undocumented students before, shortly after, and three to four years after the implementation of AB540; data were collected through forty-three interviews with twenty-seven respondents (Abrego, 2008). Findings revealed that marginalized groups such as undocumented students feel

confined and helpless in a system that they try to resist in multiple ways.

However, through AB540 legislation, these students can reposition themselves and emphasize their merits. Undocumented students are able to mobilize the law and use it to their advantage (Abrego, 2008).

Similarly, in her study, Flores (2010) found that in states with the resident tuition legislation there was a significant positive effect on the odds of college enrollment after the tuition policy was enacted. Foreign-born, non-citizen Latinos were over 1.5 times more likely to enroll in college after the enactment of tuition policies than the same population in the rest of the U.S. Flores (2010) concluded that in-state resident tuition affirmatively affects the college decisions of students who are likely to be undocumented. However, she recommended that more research is needed on the topic of undocumented immigrants.

Overall, AB540 has been relatively successful (Abrego, 2008; Enriquez, 2011; National Immigration Law Center, 2018). According to Abrego (2008), the fundamental effects of the law have symbolic significance for undocumented students. AB 540 signifies that these students belong in this society and supports their endeavors of legitimacy (Abrego, 2008). Certainly, AB540 has made community college more accessible and affordable for students due to the in-state tuition benefit. However, attending a university remains in many cases unattainable (Pérez et al., 2010; Terriquez, 2015).

Taken together, access to a post-secondary education remains a challenge for undocumented students, even those who are able to benefit from

their state's version of AB540, as they are not eligible to receive federal financial aid in the form of grants, loans, or work-study (Gonzales, 2009; Pérez, 2010). However, a subset of the undocumented population eligible for DACA can obtain jobs to subsidize college costs.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Since 2012, approximately 800,000 young undocumented immigrants have been able to obtain work permits and have been protected from deportation through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program also known as DACA (Hsin & Ortega, 2018). As of September 2017, close to 690,000 DACA recipients were enrolled in the program, and they were able to retain their benefits, which last two years (López & Krogstad, 2017). Of this group of undocumented immigrants, approximately 110,000 are no longer enrolled in the DACA program; 70,000 did not submit their DACA renewals or their applications were denied and 40,000 experienced a change in immigration status (López & Krogstad, 2017).

In order to qualify for DACA, potential recipients must meet certain conditions such as: (1) being enrolled in high school or have obtained a high school diploma or GED equivalent; (2) or are honorably discharged from the Coast Guard or United States Armed Forces; (3) and not have being convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more other misdemeanors; (4) or not pose a threat to national security or public safety (López & Krogstad, 2017).

Gonzales, Terriquez, and Ruszczyk's (2014) work relied on survey data from the National UnDACAmented Research Project (NURP), the first national survey of DACA recipients (Gonzales et al., 2014). The study examined the experiences of undocumented young adults who were the recipients of DACA benefits within the first 16 months of implementation. It included data collected in 2013 through a web survey from a national sample of 2,381 DACA participants ages 18 to 32 who had transitioned to "illegal status" (p. 1858) and did not possess the educational and social benefits that minors do (Gonzales et al., 2014). The authors found that DACA had diminished the challenges that undocumented young people must conquer to succeed economically and socially. However, those who appeared to benefit the most were those who had a higher level of education and access to more family and community resources (Gonzales et al., 2014). Because there is no pathway to citizenship, a large group of undocumented young adults has difficulty as they transition to undocumented status because they have reached adulthood. As a result, the future of this student population remains unknown as their immigration status remains uncertain (Murillo, 2017).

Gonzales et al., (2014) concluded DACA provides policy makers, scholars, and the community with an opportunity to better understand the impact of policies that aim to expand access for undocumented populations. DACA has the potential to be more inclusive by providing high achieving "DREAMers" the opportunity to maximize their potential. Through DACA, recipients obtained

short-term benefits such as employment, internships, acquired credit cards, opened bank accounts, and obtained driver's licenses, which afforded them the opportunity to drive to school and work (Gonzales et al., 2014). However, DACA is not a permanent solution. As the authors stated, "at best, DACA is a second-class status" (Gonzales et al., 2014, p. 1867). It does not provide its recipients with legal status or a pathway toward legality (Gonzales et al., 2014).

The future of DACA is in limbo after President Donald Trump announced his plan to phase it out (López & Krogstad, 2017). The President's announcement called for the U.S. government to cease accepting new DACA applications and to stop receiving any renewals on October 5, 2017 (López & Krogstad, 2017). Trump urged congress to provide new legislation for undocumented immigrants enrolled in DACA by March 5, 2018 but congress failed to do so (Hayes, 2018). On February 26, 2018, the Supreme Court rejected the Trump administration's appeal to intervene in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision to continue to accept DACA applications indefinitely (Hayes, 2018). As of November 2018, the same court affirmed that the Trump administration's decision to end DACA was unlawful (National Immigration Law Center, 2018).

In sum, although the Plyler v. Doe 1982 Supreme Court Decision ruled that undocumented students were guaranteed a free public education, this decision only applied to K-12 students. Access to a post-secondary education remains a challenge for undocumented students, even those who are able to

benefit from their state's version of AB540 and DACA. In the following section, I examine the post-secondary opportunities and challenges faced by undocumented students, which have been negatively influenced by what the Southern Poverty Law Center (2016) labeled as the "Trump Effect" (Muñoz, Vigil, Jach, & Rodriguez-Gutierrez, 2018, p. 1).

Post-secondary Pathways & Barriers

It is estimated that approximately 65,000 undocumented students who have lived in the United States for five years or longer graduate from high schools across the country each year (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012; Muñoz, 2013; Pérez, 2014). Due to the changing U.S. landscape in terms of an economy, that favors a more knowledge-based workforce, post-secondary education has become increasingly important (Bjorklund, Jr. 2018; Juárez, 2017; Varela, 2011). However, only about 5% to 10% of the 65,000 undocumented student population continue their education and enroll in a post-secondary institution and just 1% to 3% obtain a college degree (Richards & Bohorquez, 2015). This is not to suggest that undocumented students do not have high educational aspirations and achievements. In fact, Pérez's (2010) research on college-eligible undocumented students indicated that more than 90 percent of the 110 students surveyed aspired to pursue a master's degree or higher. Furthermore, undocumented students demonstrated academic achievement, participated in civic engagement, and were often more involved than their US-born citizens (Pérez, 2010). Gonzales (2008) also references the civic

engagement and political activism among undocumented youth who “struggle to become American and in the process they are rewriting their own stories” (p. 239).

Hinton (2015) illustrates another example on the value of civic engagement of undocumented students. In his ethnographic study, Hinton (2015) writes about a support group called IDEAS: Improving Dreams Equality Access and Success (as cited in Escobar et al., 2008) that was formed by undocumented students at a prominent university in California. IDEAS members have emerged as influencers of state policy, lobbyists and organizers (Hinton, 2015). Hinton (2015) shares that “rather than an expense, activist undocumented immigrants must be considered an asset to a campus community” (p. 162). By doing so, universities create engaged global citizens (Hinton, 2015). Furthermore, in their research on the civic engagement of a national sample of Mexican Americans, both immigrants and non-citizens, Barreto and Muñoz (2003) found that Mexican American immigrants are politically active. The authors found that “the foreign-born are not less likely to be active than native-born respondents” (p. 1).

High concentrations of undocumented students enroll in U.S. community colleges (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012; Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Pérez, 2010; Terriquez, 2015). Case in point, of the estimated 74,000- 87,000 undocumented students enrolled in California public higher education, 50,000 – 70,000 are concentrated in the California Community Colleges. Meanwhile, 10,000-12,000

are enrolled at the California State University System and roughly, 3,800-5,000 attend the Universities of California (Supporting Undocumented Students, 2017). Community colleges serve as a gateway to higher education for undocumented students because of their accessibility (Terriquez, 2015), flexibility for undocumented DACA students who want to work, and cost (Hsin & Ortega, 2018; Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2019) the 2017-2018 academic year, annual in-state tuition averaged \$3,570 at public community colleges and \$9,970 at public colleges and universities.

Although community colleges present a promising pathway for undocumented students, it is important to recall that 80% of students entering community college intend to earn a bachelor's degree (Fink & Jenkins, 2017; Jenkins & Fink, 2016), yet within 6 years, less than 15% earn a bachelor's degree (Fink & Jenkins, 2017). In addition, only one third transfer to a 4-year institution (Fink & Jenkins, 2017). Even in states that offer tuition-free community college programs such as Tennessee and Nevada, undocumented students are not able to benefit from them (Smith, 2019). In 2017, California passed Assembly Bill (AB) 19 known as the California College Promise program, which allocated \$46 million to the 114 community colleges in the state. The original law aimed to provide free-tuition to first year, full-time students from low income backgrounds however, the final version of the bill has given community colleges more flexibility on how the funds are used (Zinshteyn, 2019). However, one of

the criteria to qualify for the program is that students must be California residents or be exempt from non-resident fees under Assembly Bill (AB) 540 and be enrolled full-time (Zinshteyn, 2019). This is problematic for undocumented students who have difficulty staying enrolled full-time (Terriquez, 2015). Most recently and beginning with the 2019-2020 academic year, Maryland and New York introduced scholarship programs that can help eligible undocumented students pay for community college (Smith, 2019).

The academic persistence, resiliency, and performance among undocumented students have been well established in the literature (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Pérez et al., 2009; Villegas & Villegas, 2019). In their examination of the academic resilience of undocumented immigrant Latino students (N=104) through both regression and cluster analyses, Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes (2009) revealed that the academic success (resilience) of undocumented students is attributed to their personal (e.g., belief in their own abilities, bilingualism, coping with distress) and environmental (e.g., family members, friends, teachers, participation in volunteer and extracurricular activities, and growing up with both parents) resources (Pérez et al., 2009). When sources of support were present, academic performance was positive even when students encountered psychosocial risks such as employment during high school, sense of rejection due to immigration status, low parental school attainment, and large family size (Pérez et al., 2009). In addition to relying on their parents and peers, undocumented students participate in civic

engagement to help handle stress caused by their immigration status, because by doing so, they feel they are contributors to their community and society (Pérez et al., 2010). These findings are also consistent with Muñoz's (2013) research on college persistence among undocumented Mexican college women. Through a case study approach, four participants shared their stories on how their immigration status served as a barrier and a motivator to persist in post-secondary education (Muñoz, 2013).

Relying on data on undocumented students entering the Urban College System in New York (UCSNY), Conger and Chellman (2013) compared their educational choices and performance with those of U.S. citizens, permanent residents, visa holders, refugees, and asylum seekers. The sample in the study consisted of 42,501 students who enrolled in associate degree programs and 51,844 students who enrolled in bachelor degree programs between the fall of 1999 and the fall of 2004. Undocumented students comprised approximately 2% of the entire sample of 94,345 students in both degree programs. The results suggest that undocumented students who enrolled in associate and bachelor degree programs perform well during their first semester and year of college when compared to their U.S. citizen peers. Undocumented students were also more likely than U.S. citizens to earn their associate degrees in two or three years; however, they took longer to complete their bachelor's degree in four or even six years. Undocumented students were also less likely to enroll on a full-time basis and needed more developmental work prior to enrollment than U.S.

citizens. The authors found that despite barriers such as lack of federal financial aid, stressful interactions with other students and campus staff and limited job opportunities (Conger & Chellman, 2013); undocumented students who enrolled in associate degree programs in UCSNY, earned higher GPAs and college credit completion rates in their first semester of college when compared to U.S. citizens, which again highlights high student persistence and resiliency.

Despite high educational aspirations and educational achievement, undocumented students encounter difficulties staying enrolled and stop out at higher rates than other students (Terriquez, 2015). In the following subsections, I expand on some of the barriers noted above and introduce additional barriers beyond the legislative halls. Although I present the barriers separately in order to facilitate reading, they are very much interrelated.

Transition to Illegality

As discussed previously, although the children of undocumented immigrant families are able to attend U.S. public schools legally and at no cost from elementary to high school, many are still forced to put their academic dreams on hold because this protection does not extend to the post-secondary level (Pérez et al., 2010). In his examination of the transition to adulthood among undocumented Latino students classified as Generation 1.5, Gonzales (2011) conceptualized the *transition to illegality*. This transition involves leaving the legal protection that they have in the K-12 system and entering into adulthood where legal status is required in order to fully engage in all aspects of society.

Navigating this transition has overwhelming implications regarding these students' identity, friendships, goals and aspirations as well as social and economic mobility (Gonzales, 2011). As undocumented students move through this process, they must adapt to a new way of living.

Gonzales (2011) examined the way these young adults become aware of and understand their status and its affects as they transition from adolescence to adulthood. The ethnographic study consisted of 150 semi-structured interviews with young adults ages 20-24, which focused on the childhood and adolescent experiences of undocumented young adults while growing up in Southern California. The sampling process was designed to include almost equal numbers of males and females and equal numbers of participants who had dropped out of high school, had completed high school, and those who had attended some college (Gonzales, 2011). Data collection for this study took almost four and a half years of fieldwork from 2003-2007 and 2008-2009 (Gonzales, 2011).

Findings revealed that these young adults described their experiences as moving from an inclusive livelihood during their younger years to denied participation in early adulthood. "Waking up to a nightmare" is how they described this transition (Gonzales, 2011, p. 615). Gonzales (2011) suggested that successful integration of this population of undocumented young adults might depend on "U.S. history, on immigration policy, and the role of the state" (Gonzales, 2011, p. 616). The participants in the study are part of a larger and growing population who are now adults. Because legislation efforts to grant them

legal status has moved at a slow pace, they will continue to be in the shadows. The experiences of these students affect them as they transition into adulthood placing them in jeopardy of becoming more disenfranchised (Gonzales, 2011).

Financial Challenges

As mentioned earlier, the difference in cost of tuition for in-state versus out-of-state students is significant and it deters undocumented students from enrolling in college (Drachman, 2006) or pursuing their original college choice (e.g., community college vs. four-year college); (Pérez, 2010). Drawing upon Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Policy Discourse Analysis (PDA), Gildersleeve and Hernandez (2012) investigated in-state resident tuition (ISRT) policies in twelve states that have enacted such policies within the last decade. Both CDA and PDA are methods of analysis used to examine ISRT policy. CDA focused on the language of ISRT statutes while PDA helped unveil gaps within ISRT policy. Gildersleeve and Hernandez (2012) found that for the most part, state and federal policies are often politicized and legislated under divided views. The concerns surrounding undocumented students are of political nature and are centered on their rights to higher education opportunities. The issue of higher education for undocumented students is even more complex as there are institutions in various states with no clear policy on ISRT that either extends or restricts in-state tuition benefits (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012; Harmon et al., 2010). In general, more information regarding financial aid and the financial aid process are necessary to provide students with college access (Martinez, 2018).

Although some states such as California, New York, and Texas have passed legislation that provides undocumented students with the benefit of receiving in-state tuition and/or state financial aid, these students struggle because federal legislation limits their eligibility to receive financial assistance in the form of federal grants, loans, and work study (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte & Meiners, 2011; Ibarra & Sherman, 2012). Given restrictions on federal funds, undocumented students are frequently encouraged to pursue other sources of funding, such as private scholarships and sponsors; nonetheless, there is little to no security in funding and in assurance that they will be eligible (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011).

Pérez et al., (2010) pointed to the distressful experiences of students who lose their scholarships due to their undocumented status as an example of the obstacles they encounter due to the lack of securing enough funds to pay for school. Undocumented students shared this experience numerous times. One student, for example, had earned a merit presidential scholarship at a public university that could have paid for all her expenses; however, when the school learned about her immigration status, they rescinded it (Pérez et al., 2010). In other instances, the anxiety about their status prevented undocumented students from applying for scholarships and internships altogether (Pérez et al., 2010).

Given the findings related to financial barriers faced by undocumented students in college, career, and life, various scholars have made a call to action. Based on a review of the literature, Varela (2011) called on policymakers to

design pathways for undocumented youth to have access to education, legalization and full participation in the democracy of the U.S. Varela (2011) argues that although undocumented youth in some instances, are permitted to continue their education at colleges and universities, they are not able to obtain employment that would compensate them with a salary representative of their credentials and qualifications (Varela, 2011). As a result, many undocumented students do not realize their professional aspirations. Their needs are incomplete and divided (Varela, 2011). The lack of uniform policies that could assist undocumented students further their education, actually contribute to restricting access, exacerbate the marginalization of immigrant populations, and deprives them of their constitutional rights in this country (Varela, 2011).

Similarly, Diaz-Strong et al., (2011) also determined that the lack of financial aid constraints undocumented students from pursuing a college education and more specifically concluded that this student population is being systematically purged from higher education (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). Over the course of 3 years and using a grounded theory approach, the researchers collected data from approximately 40 self-identified undocumented or formerly undocumented youth who attended college, obtained a college degree or were seniors in high school with plans to attend college. The participants were interviewed and responded to questions on topics such as educational experiences, family, border crossings and future aspirations (Diaz-Strong et al.,

2011). In their findings, issues related to financial support and resources emerged as illustrated by Luz, a 19-year-old participant:

“It’s possible for undocumented students to apply, but the way everything is set up, it’s so expensive and you’re not going to get any financial aid, so it’s like they’re teasing you.” (p. 111). The difficulty of attending college due to the associated cost is reflected in this participant’s statement. She feels as if the system is deceiving students.

Furthermore, Ruge and Iza (2005) agree that admitting undocumented students to post-secondary institutions and granting them in-state tuition are permitted by federal law and are socially responsible and good public policy. By providing educational opportunities to these students, they will be able to contribute both to society and to the economy. Doing otherwise would result in producing an underutilized and under-educated population (Ruge & Iza, 2005).

Socio-Emotional Challenges

In addition to dealing with the financial barriers of attending college, undocumented students struggle with socio-emotional challenges, which include, but are not limited to stress, depression, and anxiety (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). These socio-emotional challenges make it more difficult for them to remain in school and graduate (Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). In fact, these realities affect not just the children of immigrants but also their parents and family members who typically contribute to paying for college (Pérez et al., 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Pérez et al., (2010) explored the socioemotional and academic experiences of both Latina and Latino undocumented college students. The authors presented these experiences through thirteen student testimonials. They illustrated several cases where undocumented students who were fully eligible to enter a four-year institution after high school turned down their admission offer because they did not qualify for financial aid causing them a high level of distress (Pérez et al., 2010). The students described their undocumented status as a curse and a blessing. One participant named Guillermo expressed his feelings about his immigration status as follows:

Being an undocumented student in the United States is like being “cursed and blessed” at the same time. Cursed, in that you are marginalized by society, and you have to live in fear almost every day. Blessed, in the fact that you use that experience, and you become a much better person because of everything that you struggled with. You work ten times as hard as, maybe, somebody who takes it for granted because they were born in this country, or somebody who is a legal resident and doesn’t know exactly what that means and what power they have. (Pérez et al., 2010, p. 35).

Undocumented students feel their immigration status is a curse because it limits their options in terms of higher education, they feel marginalized and they live in fear (Pérez et al., 2010) and with high levels of anxiety (Abrego, 2011). These students also stated that being undocumented was a blessing. Their

immigration status made them stronger, made them work harder and used that experience to their advantage. Pérez, et al., (2010) also highlighted the feelings undocumented students deal with when they experience rejection, issues of trust, and insecurity. These feelings include a sense of shame and a sense of discrimination. The stories shared by students illustrated how their legal status affects their outlook on life. They feel ashamed because they do not see themselves as being like everyone else. They do not have an ID or a driver's license. Another student explained how a counselor who was unfamiliar with the AB 540 California Law discriminated against her and even after she explained to him that she could go to college and pay in-state tuition because of this law, he discouraged her from doing so. These exchanges demonstrate the hostile behavior undocumented students are exposed to in their everyday lives. Exclusion from higher education is another reality faced by undocumented students that make them feel insignificant or not belonging to society (Pérez et al., 2010)

Similarly, Siemons, Raymond-Flesh, Auerswald and Brindis (2017), found that DACA recipients who have certain protections, identified mental health and well-being as one of their greatest concerns. Participants in this study indicated that while DACA provided them with certain benefits that alleviated some stressors, it also introduced other challenges such as additional adult responsibilities and a vulnerable identity. Furthermore, Pérez et al., (2010) in their article on the socioemotional experiences and characteristics of

undocumented college students examined the impact of these experiences on undocumented students' academic and mental health and how these students deal with socioemotional and academic challenges as a result of their immigration status (Pérez et al., 2010). Specifically, they pointed out to factors such as poverty, lack of resources, violence, and discrimination that affect the mental health of the undocumented student population (Pérez et al., 2010). Despite the daunting challenges undocumented youth experience, they are resilient and maintain a sense of hope by developing strong friendships and relying on caring and trusting adults with whom they can talk candidly about their struggles (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguinetti, 2013).

Additionally, Harmon et al., (2010) brought to light the marginalization of undocumented students in both secondary and post-secondary education. Sara, a former undocumented student who came to the United States at the age of twelve shared the following:

I graduated with honors [from high school]. I was so happy that I asked my counselor to help me to go to college. She told me that I was just another undocumented girl and that she could not help me. I insisted she help, but she only wrote on my school records on red ink, "She is undocumented." I thought my dreams would not end here. I knew that school was the only way for me to be successful. I went to a local college and was initially told I could not enroll because I was undocumented; but God was with me and

he provided an angel willing to help me fulfill my dream. (Harmon et al., 2010, p. 67)

This is but one of many student stories that reflect the struggles of undocumented students which impact their mental health as they pursue higher education. In addition to the inconsistencies in immigration legislation from state to state and across the nation, undocumented students struggle with deep-rooted “cultural, societal and systemic bias around belief, power and privilege” (Harmon et al., 2010, p. 68).

In attempts to address the social and emotional issues undocumented students experience, Storlie and Jach (2012) in their conceptual work, drew upon the Collaborative Social Justice Model (CSJM). This model promotes social action in the K-12 system and is aimed at assisting college counselors and student affairs professionals to help undocumented students thrive. The socio-emotional experiences of undocumented students, which are a result of their immigration status, include adjusting to a different culture, learning English, living environment and shifting family roles (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Children of immigrants face an array of challenges including economic uncertainty, obstacles to schooling, substandard health outcomes, and the detention and deportation of family members (Androff, Ayon, Becerra, & Gurrola, 2011). Adding to their already limited opportunities to access higher education, undocumented students must also contend with the lack of proper documentation like a driver’s license or government issued identification. Such identification would aid them to secure

employment and consequently address some of their financial concerns discussed previously. These hardships often become emotional and psychological issues for undocumented students (Storlie & Jach, 2012).

Likewise, Morrison et al., (2016) support existing and previously mentioned literature indicating that undocumented students face an array of roadblocks related to their educational, social, and emotional advancement. A great number of undocumented students feel hopeless about their future because they believe they do not possess the ability to pursue college (Morrison et al., 2016). Hopelessness leads to uncertainty for their future, lack of self-efficacy to continue on their path to college and the inability to secure desirable employment (Morrison et al., 2016). They also have feelings of loneliness, fear and isolation (Kim, 2012), which previous studies have established lead to student attrition (Martinez-Calderón, 2009; Muñoz, 2013). Sense of belonging is essential to student success (Abrego, 2011; Torres & Wicks-Asbun, 2014). Kim (2012) also found that undocumented students do not possess the dominant forms of social capital to establish connections outside of their circle (Kim, 2012). Consequently, developing new friendships is challenging for undocumented students and they limit their relationships to students from their same country of origin (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010).

Support Systems

To cope with the stresses related to their immigration status, undocumented students rely on various people and support mechanisms

including: parents, peers, institutional agents (i.e., faculty and staff), civic engagement activities, and campus support programs (Pérez et al., 2010).

Parents and Peers

Existing research recognizes that undocumented students are determined to pursue their educational goals because of the challenges their parents had to overcome to bring them to this country (Coronado, 2008; Cortés, 2008; Contreras, 2009; Pérez, 2009). As highlighted by Pérez et al., (2010), students often speak of the support and love their parents provided as well as the opportunities afforded to them that they would not have received if they had remained in their native country (Pérez et al., 2010). As one of the participants in the study by Perez et al., (2010) Diego, said:

My mother always told me that school was the only way for me to succeed...She always reminds me that I have more opportunities than her because she couldn't attend elementary school, and that we could help her or help others in the future, once we succeed. (p. 41)

Diego expressed the advice, support and encouragement his mother provided him. His testimony aligns with the stories of other undocumented students (Enriquez, 2011; Gonzales, 2011; Pérez, 2010).

Monica also spoke about her parents' influence:

My parents always push me to go to school. They always encouraged us because they didn't have much education—formal education. So they knew that they had very hard and tough lives because of that. They couldn't get

the jobs that they were very much capable of doing because of that, so they always encouraged us to go to school. (Pérez, 2010, p. 41).

In this study, Monica, referenced her parents as motivators for going to school. She mentioned that although her parents did not obtain degrees, they were encouraging and motivated her to attend school. These stories illustrate the importance of parental support in undocumented students college journey (Pérez et al., 2009).

Student Agency Through Political Activism

Undocumented students have been involved in political activism as a form of resistance to cope with the stress their immigration status brings (Hinton, 2015; Galindo, 2012; Gonzales, 2008; Pérez et al., 2010). Galindo (2012) focused his work on the political activism of undocumented students via two prominent political events aimed at advocating for the passage of the DREAM Act that would have provided undocumented students with access to affordable education beyond high school and a pathway to citizenship. The two locations of the study were Chicago, Illinois and Tucson, Arizona where undocumented students held a march and a sit-in respectively. It was during these events that they revealed their immigration status in a public setting without fear although they were at risk of deportation (Galindo, 2012).

Participants, dubbed The DREAM Act 5, which consisted of four undocumented students and one counselor who introduced civil disobedience as a political and strategic platform in support of the DREAM Act. These events

resulted in a new political campaign called “Undocumented & Unafraid” which rejected the marginalization of undocumented immigrant students. To date, this campaign has evolved into a national movement that has inspired young undocumented students and allies to organize and advocate for change in immigration laws (Wong & Ramos, 2011).

Data sources included articles, interviews from the press, and student advocacy blogs and letters written to President Obama from the four undocumented students of the DREAM Act 5 during the summer of 2010. The letters were considered political personal narratives referred to as *testimonios* (Galindo, 2012, p. 591). The *testimonios* included “coming out” (Galindo, 2012, p. 591) stories from other undocumented students who shared their narratives, explanations of their civil disobedience, and urgently appealed to then president Obama to support the DREAM Act (Galindo, 2012).

Through the process of political advocacy and agency, undocumented students carried out actions that contested exclusion and they made themselves seen, heard, and noticed as participants in the political arena (Galindo, 2012). Undocumented students used their political actions to challenge the expectations of the “dominant order” (Galindo, 2012 p. 594), which viewed them as not equal to their counterparts; and in this way, they declared equality as recognized by the Plyler court decision. *Testimonios* served as a counter-story for undocumented students to self-disclose their immigration status publicly in their quest to gain access to higher education and citizenship.

Similarly, in her article Rincón (2010) shared the story of three undocumented students who enrolled and graduated from college and were detained by police while driving. Because of this experience, these students launched individual campaigns to fight deportation efforts, which would send them back to the countries they emigrated from as children. These efforts generated a movement to delay deportation and generate support for the DREAM Act, a federal proposal that would provide some undocumented students with a pathway towards permanent residency (Rincón, 2010). Rincón concluded, “the fight of the undocumented today is for equality” (Rincón, 2010, p.17).

According to Evans, 2000 (as cited in Harmon et al., 2010, p. 76) the “outlaw culture” refers to a movement of committed educators and higher education professionals to achieve social justice, equity, and equality on behalf of undocumented students. This phenomenon is beginning to reduce barriers such as those that restrict educational access, and provide more opportunities for this student population (Harmon et al., 2010). Furthermore, Nájera (2015) in her case study portrays the experiences of undocumented students regarding political activism at a University of California campus. Though the efforts of the support group called PODER (Providing Opportunities, Dreams, and Education in Riverside), undocumented students advocate for the rights of the larger undocumented community and challenge any negative perceptions of this group (Nájera, 2016). Consistent with previously cited literature (Hinton, 2015; Galindo, 2012; Gonzales, 2008; Pérez et al., 2010) Anguiano and Nájera (2015) highlight

the narratives of undocumented students who have used activism to dispel preconceived notions regarding their immigration status. Furthermore, in their article on the movement of undocumented youth, Terriquez, Brenes and López (2018) illustrate the activism efforts in the early 2010's of undocumented students across the country aimed at gaining support for the DREAM Act. In addition to addressing the needs of the immigrant community as a whole, these young activists became involved in advocating for other immigrants' rights and social justice issues. These efforts brought to light the multiple intersectionalities of undocumented students and their collective approach to action (Terriquez, Brenes & López, 2018).

Political activism however, expands beyond the school setting. As illustrated by Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad (2008) in the spring of 2006 pro-immigration marches in the United States included several million demonstrators from community organizations, immigrant advocacy groups, labor unions and religious institutions with the intent to engage effectively in the political arena. This type of activism prevented the passage of the Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act. Most importantly, during these marches immigrants and the undocumented community, "came out of the shadows and into the light" (Voss & Bloemraad, 2011, p. ix).

Institutional Agents and Campus Support Programs

As noted previously, a large proportion of undocumented students who attend college are first generation (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2010; Gonzales,

2011; Pérez, 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2012; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Although their parents value education (Pérez et al., 2009) it is likely that they have limited knowledge of the college admission process. Therefore, students must rely on institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2011), such as admissions officers, advisors, and faculty for support and assistance (Gildersleeve & Hernandez 2012). According to Stanton-Salazar (2011), institutional agents are “high-status, non-kin, agents who occupy relatively high positions in the multiple dimensional stratification system, and who are well positioned to provide key forms of social and institutional support” (p. 1066). Undocumented students often note how the advice they receive from institutional agents such as faculty and professional staff motivated them to continue in their educational journey (Pérez et al., 2010).

Suárez-Orozco et al., (2015) examined ways to improve undocumented students’ experiences at private and public campuses across the country. The sample population consisted of 909 self-identified undergraduate undocumented students at both two-year and four-year colleges and universities (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). In their findings, Suárez-Orozco and colleagues report that given the various challenges undocumented students face in their pursuit of a college degree, such as family issues and financial constraints to fear of deportation and anxiety; it is imperative that we hear their voice and understand their needs in order to provide these students with the assistance they need to succeed. The findings of Suárez-Orozco et al., (2015) support the results of Gildersleeve and

Hernandez (2010) in that undocumented students are first-generation and are in need of institutional agents to help them navigate post-secondary education. Accordingly, in their study, Nienhusser, and Espino (2017) investigated the undocumented/DACAmented status competency (UDSC) of higher education institutional agents. The UDSC was based on the skill set higher education institutional agents need in order to support undocumented students. Notwithstanding these barriers, undocumented students have demonstrated incredible tenacity in dealing with these difficulties (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). In her study of fifty-four undocumented college students Enriquez (2011) states there is a need for greater understanding on how these students develop and use social capital to navigate K-12 and pursue higher education. The author mentions that undocumented students receive both financial and emotional support through various sources including family members, peers and teachers. However, they need more resources and support specific to their legal status, which is often given by other undocumented students rather than institutional agents. Enriquez (2011) demonstrated that undocumented students rely on “patchworking, the haphazard piecing together of various resources, in order to achieve their educational goal” (p. 1).

As mentioned earlier, in their conceptual piece, Storlie and Jach (2012) drew upon the Collaborative Social Justice Model (CSJM). In writing about the unique challenges undocumented students encounter in the school setting, they highlighted the significant amount of collaborative work that must take place

between secondary and post-secondary education to support the educational aspirations of undocumented students. Although some progress has been made, as illustrated in the following excerpt, much work remains:

I wish I would have known ahead of time that things weren't going to be the same for me. I hated comparing myself to friends and family who had papers and seeing the opportunities they had. I wanted to go to college but no one at school ever talked to me about it – or how I could make it possible. I was accepted to three colleges but there was no way my family and I could pay out of pocket. (Storlie & Jach, 2012, p. 100)

Accordingly, the authors advanced the collaborative social justice model (CSJM), which can be implemented within the K-16 system. This holistic approach includes collaborative interventions for social action that will assist school counseling professionals and student affairs educators to provide better opportunities to this marginalized student population. The study also emphasized ways to break down the barriers faced by undocumented students in the educational arena. Of equal importance is the need for education professionals to work together employing a social justice perspective to meet the unique needs of these students (Storlie & Jach, 2012).

Taken together, colleges and universities have a responsibility to support the undocumented student population and provide them with the resources they need to enroll and succeed in college (Pérez et al., 2010). To this point, Pérez (2010) shared various strategies that can guide professionals to provide college

access and support to this student population. Pérez (2010) called on educators to ask the following questions: “Are there adequate resources in place to facilitate undocumented students’ enrollment? Will college personnel be sensitive and adept in working with this student population?” (Pérez, 2010, p. 34). Finally, Pérez (2010) suggested schools need to do more outreach and recruitment of undocumented students, seek ways to facilitate transfer to four-year colleges, provide social support, offer training for faculty and staff on issues sensitive to undocumented students and provide support services such as counseling for this population. Many of the recommendations advanced by these scholars are increasingly being heeded by undocumented student resource centers across various colleges and universities, which I discuss next.

Undocumented Student Resource Centers

Immigrants have relied on community support groups and networks to navigate their new life in the United States (Muñoz & Collazo, 2014). As time has progressed and in addition to the contributions of these groups in the immigrant community, such efforts have transcended into the educational environment. Colleges and universities across the country have established dedicated spaces for undocumented students in attempts to provide support during their college experience (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al, 2015).

Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs), variably referred to as DREAMers Centers or Undocumented Student Success Centers, play an

instrumental role in supporting first-year, transfer, and graduate undocumented students in higher education (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018). Broadly speaking, undocumented student resource centers provide a welcoming, safe, and supportive space intended to improve students' college experience. In addition, USRCs provide opportunities for civic engagement and help strengthen students' physical and mental well-being (Canedo Sanchez & So, 2015; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015), which are critical for positive student outcomes. USRCs help establish a more undocufriendly campus (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

The first undocumented student resource center in the U.S. was established at the University of California, Berkeley in 2012 because of the issues and needs of the undocumented population on campus. Through their personal stories, Canedo Sanchez and So (2015), documented the development of the Undocumented Student Program (USP) whose mission is “to support the advancement of undocumented students within higher education and promote pathways for engaged scholarship” (p. 466).

Canedo Sanchez and So (2015) detailed how universities can gain support and resources, build staff capacity, and develop nontraditional allies for undocumented students. Their approach to the development of the USP was a service model with the goal of providing personal, holistic, and solution-oriented service (Canedo Sanchez & So, 2015). The researchers also illustrated the establishment of their UndocuAlly Training Program, which focuses on making

staff, faculty, and administrators aware of the undocumented students' experiences and how to best support them not only academically but also socially and professionally. Another strategy used to propel USP as a model program, was the creation of the On-Campus Undocumented Communities Task Force. This task force was requested by undocumented students and it brought together not only undocumented undergraduate students but also graduate students, professional staff from key departments such as Admissions, Financial Aid, Health Services, etc. and faculty. The main "goal of the Task Force is to ensure that undocumented students could successfully enroll and access institutional support needed to succeed at Berkeley" (Canedo Sanchez & So, 2015, p. 470). The authors also touched on Berkeley's journey to mobilize politically in order to develop intentional programs and establish centers that provide access and support for undocumented students. They also highlighted some of the obstacles they encountered as they established the USP. Primarily, staff on campus expressed a certain level of fear and hesitation about providing services and programming to undocumented students. These fears stemmed from lack of knowledge about institutional changes, university processes, and preconceived notions about this student population. Through candid conversations with campus stakeholders Canedo Sanchez and So (2015) identified solutions to breakdown institutional barriers and provide undocumented students with equitable opportunities to succeed.

Recently, the University of California published findings from their empirical research on the needs of undocumented students across the ten campuses in the system. The results are similar to those reported by Drachman (2006), Diaz-Strong et al., (2011), Suárez-Orozco et al., (2011), and Ibarra and Sherman (2012) regarding financial challenges, academic distractions, and the uncertainty of employment opportunities for undocumented students. The research showed that 46% of undocumented students faced high financial need; 64% reported food insecurity; and over 70% were distracted from their academics due to immigration-related concerns (Enriquez et al., 2019).

As enrollment of undocumented students continues to rise, campuses across California, which has the largest undocumented student population, have established centers to help these students thrive (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018). The University of California (UC) system has provided funding for its ten campuses to open Undocumented Student Programs (USP) and the California State University System and California Community Colleges have followed suit as services and centers for undocumented students continue to emerge at these institutions (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018). The undocumented student centers serve as a safe space and one-stop shop where students can find support, connect with peer mentors, and form study groups (Canedo Sanchez & So 2015; Enriquez et al., 2019).

Cisneros and Valdivia (2018) defined USRCs as physical locations on campus assigned as centers, which provide a space for undocumented students

including those of mixed-status families to obtain institutional support (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018). Drawing on a network analysis of support services for undocumented students across higher education institutions, they identified fifty-six centers that met their criteria (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018). Their qualitative study included in-depth interviews with students, staff and faculty on forty-nine of the fifty-six campuses (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018). Consistent with other literature, their findings revealed that California has the largest concentration of undocumented immigrants; as such, it is also the state with the highest number of USRCs (n=46). In addition to institutional commitments, the organizing of undocumented students across institutions was instrumental in the creation of USRCs and support programs for this population (Canedo Sanchez & So, 2015; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018; Enriquez et al., 2019). Cisneros and Valdivia (2018) offered several implications for practice including: 1) centering the voices of undocumented students; 2) leveraging campus and community partnerships; 3) making long term investments in USRCs; 4) assessing institutional context, capacity, and organizational structure; 5) increasing the capacity of USRC practitioners; 6) developing sustainable funding opportunities; and 7) engaging allies (pp. 10-11).

Similarly, based on focus groups and interviews with 214 undocumented undergraduate students Enriquez et al., (2019) revealed that it is important for institutions to provide student services and resources for this population; and that despite advances in state and institutional financial aid, many undocumented

students continue to struggle to meet basic expenses. In addition, the study found that undocumented students expressed distractions related to their immigration status and experienced high levels of stress as they wrestle with balancing academic responsibilities. Students also shared having limited post-graduate opportunities and felt they were not prepared to pursue their career goals (Enriquez et al., 2019; Pérez et al., 2010). These findings are consistent with the work of Suárez-Orozco et al., (2015) in that undocumented students call for campuses to be well informed of this population, provide training on how to best meet their needs, and offer responsive counseling services. Cisneros and Cadenas (2017) focused their work on an educational intervention called DREAMzone which is designed to increase the competency and self-efficacy of higher education professionals who work with undocumented students. Based on social learning theory, the authors developed the DREAMer-ally instrument to examine the outcomes of the DREAMzone intervention on the DREAMer-ally competency and self-efficacy. The findings support the idea that DREAMzone has a positive effect on the participants' competency and self-efficacy. While these studies are insightful into USRCs and their role in promoting student success, the literature on USRCs remains limited. Cisneros and Valdivia (2018) offered an overview of the national landscape of USCRs, however, more in-depth comprehensive studies are needed to help inform and expand the creation of Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs).

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative research study was grounded in Undocumented Critical Theory (UndocuCrit). UndocuCrit is a developing theory advanced by Aguilar (2018) and influenced by Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit), and Tribal Critical Race Theory (Tribal Crit). Aguilar (2018) introduced UndocuCrit to gain a better understanding of the “nuanced and liminal experiences that characterize undocumented communities in the United States” (p. 152). To fully understand UndocuCrit, an overview of CRT and CRT in education, in particular, is needed.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the early 1970's in the legal profession and as an academic movement with the writings of Derrick Bell, an attorney and the first African American to teach at Harvard Law School (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). CRT was first introduced as an analytical framework to assess educational inequities in 1994 (Decuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Crenshaw (2010), offers a perspective on the history of CRT through a “prism that that highlights the relevance of its institutional articulation in light of contemporary discourses on race and racism” (p. 1255). CRT has grown to be a comprehensive and cross-disciplinary analytical framework, including the field of education (Solórzano, 1998). For example, CRT has been used to study racial microaggressions and campus racial climate (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), academic resources available on campus for students of color (Teranishi, Allen, & Solórzano, 2004), and college choice (Acevedo-Gil, 2015).

According to Solórzano (1998), Critical Race Theory in education “challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 122). Solórzano (1998) established the five major components or tenets of CRT in education as follows:

1. Centrality and intersectionality of race and racism: the notion that race and racism are prevalent, perpetual and inherent of American society. Race and racism are at the center of CRT and they intersect with other types of subordination specifically gender and class discrimination.
2. The challenge to dominant ideology: CRT challenges the educational system’s assertions such as color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, objectivity and equal opportunity. CRT argues that these assertions benefit, empower and privilege the dominant groups of this country.
3. The commitment to social justice: The concept of advocacy to educational equity, fairness and an end to racism and other forms of subordination.
4. The centrality of experiential knowledge: Valuing and giving a voice to people of color so they can share their narratives and lived experiences.

5. The interdisciplinary perspective: CRT insists that race and racism be analyzed in both historical and contemporary context by using interdisciplinary methods.

Taken together, CRT is a social justice lens that works against racism within K-12 and higher education (Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, 2005). Similarly, the components of Undocumented Critical Theory (UndocuCrit) align with those of CRT. In addition, UndocuCrit is the most appropriate framework for this study because historically, it highlights the inequities and marginalization underrepresented communities encounter. Finally, Aguilar (2018) summarized the main tenets of UndocuCrit as follows:

1. Fear is endemic among immigrant communities: The premise that race and racism are prevalent in society and that racist immigration legislation and practices build fear among undocumented immigrants.
2. Different experiences of liminality translate into different experiences of reality: Undocumented immigrants' experiences are not homogeneous. It is necessary to value and capture the realities of undocumented immigrants adequately.
3. Parental *sacrificios* become a form of capital: The belief that in spite of low socioeconomic status, limited educational attainment and immigration challenges, parents of undocumented students provide support, motivation and love, which encourages them to succeed academically.

4. *Acompañamiento* is the embodiment of mentorship, academic redemption, and community engagement. UndocuCrit conceptualizes *acompañamiento* (to join) as a “way to acompañar undocumented students in their trajectory through school and life, but also to acompañar and be acompañados by our communities as we create knowledge (as cited in Aguilar, 2018, p. 157).

UndocuCrit is a new theory yet to be used by other scholars.¹ Relying on the tenets of CRT, its main objective is to “validate and honor the experiences and identities of our undocumented communities” (Aguilar, 2018 p. 157). It also attempts to vindicate our communities by affirming and appreciating their diverse and valuable experiences and simultaneously rejecting the marginalization of these communities (Aguilar, 2018).

UndocuCrit provides a lens for researchers to examine the educational experiences, conditions, and outcomes of undocumented students (Aguilar, 2018). For purposes of this study, I was interested in the experiences, conditions, and outcomes for undocumented students in relation to Undocumented Student Resource Centers. Using UndocuCrit as an analytical framework as well as the existing literature on USRCs (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018), this study focused on a

¹ As of May 5, 2019 and per Google Scholar, no studies have cited Aguilar’s (2018) work published in *Critical Methodologies*.

single Undocumented Student Resource Center, and the role it played as undocumented students navigate their college journey.

Summary

In this literature review, I have provided a general overview of the demographics of undocumented students in the United States, illustrated the legislative trajectory of immigration policies at the federal and state level, and presented the post-secondary opportunities and challenges undocumented students encounter as well as their support systems. Specifically, I drew attention to Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs). In addition, I presented the conceptual framework, which guided my study. In chapter three, I discuss the research design and methodology I used to conduct my research.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, I restate the purpose of the study and list the research questions that guided this research. Second, I provide details on the design of the study, including a description of the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis. I also discuss the following components: site selection, participant selection, and strategies used to establish trustworthiness. Finally, I outline the limitations of the study and state my subjectivities.

Purpose of the Study

As noted previously, access to U.S. higher education for undocumented students has been elusive, controversial, and challenging over the years. Although recent legislative and organizational changes have afforded some undocumented students the opportunity to attend post-secondary institutions, these students remain marginalized and face greater obstacles than U.S. citizens and other legal residents (Conger & Chellman, 2013; Juárez, 2017; Mangual Figueroa, 2017). The majority of undocumented students have lived in the United States most of their lives because they were brought to this country at a very young age (Garcia & Tierney, 2011; Immigrants Rising, n.d.). Accordingly, many undocumented students attended U.S. schools their entire lives, learned English, and excelled academically (Immigrants Rising, n.d.) in spite of the

challenges they faced. Previous data estimated between 65,000 to 80,000 undocumented students graduate from high schools across the country annually (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012; Muñoz, 2013; Stuart-Carruthers, 2014) and of those, roughly 25,000 graduate from California High Schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). More recent numbers, however, indicate that approximately 98,000 undocumented students graduate from high schools across the country every year (Zong & Batalova, 2019).

Unfortunately, only a small percentage, approximately 7,000-13,000 of undocumented high school graduates enroll in post-secondary education annually (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012; Muñoz, 2013) compared to approximately 75% of their documented counterparts (Lyon, 2015). Existing literature on support systems and strategies to bridge this equity gap and help students enroll in post-secondary institutions is the establishment of Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs) or programs (Canedo Sanchez & So, 2017; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018). Generally speaking, USRCs provide a welcoming, safe and supportive environment with the goal of improving students' college experience. Additionally, these centers provide undocumented students with opportunities for civic engagement and help strengthen their physical and mental health (Canedo Sanchez & So, 2017; Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015), which are critical for positive student outcomes. Although USRCs and programs are emerging across the country, more research is necessary to institutionalize structures that explicitly affirm and

support undocumented students (Southern, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2015) and build a more culturally responsive environment for this student population (Wangensten, 2017).

Given this information, the overall purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to explore the role Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs) play in the college journey of undocumented students at a four-year, public, comprehensive institution.

Research Questions

As a reminder, the focus of this study was to explore the role an USRC plays in the college journey of undocumented students at a four-year, public, comprehensive institution. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does an USRC at a four-year, public, comprehensive university influence the experiences of undocumented students, if at all?
2. What strategies does an USRC implement to support undocumented students, if any?
3. How does an USRC influence the persistence of undocumented students, if at all?

For purposes of this study, persistence was defined as the resolve students demonstrate to remain enrolled in a college degree program, which leads to graduating from a university (Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010).

Research Design

Given the goals of this study, I selected a qualitative research design.

According to Maxwell (2012), the purpose of qualitative research is to have a better understanding of the “meaning and perspectives” of the participants in the study (p. viii). Qualitative research is an “inductive, open-ended approach, which relies on textual or visual rather than numerical data” (Maxwell, 2012 p. viii). In addition, it focuses on an in-depth understanding of people and settings rather than on generalizations (Maxwell, 2012). As noted by Merriam (1998), qualitative research is “focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspective of those being studied (p. 1). Furthermore, qualitative research is primarily exploratory, provides insight into the case or phenomenon being studied and adds a new dimension to research studies across disciplines that cannot be obtained through measurements of variables alone (Pathak, Jena, & Kalra, 2013).

Case Study

More specifically, to carry out my research, I conducted a case study.

According to Stake (2000) case study refers to an approach defined by wanting to learn more about an individual or single case and what can be learned from it. It also provides rich description and analysis of that particular case (Merriam, 2009). “A case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and product of that inquiry” (Stake, 2000, p. 436). Simons (2009) concluded that case study is “an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and

uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a real-life context” (p. 21). Finally, a case study is a “specific, unique and bounded system” (Stake, 2000, p. 436).

There are various approaches to case study (Stake, 2000). I followed an intrinsic case study design because I was interested in having a better understanding (Stake, 2000) of the role of the USRC at Westside University in particular. An intrinsic case study is not abstract or general but particular and specific (Stake, 1995, 2000). Stake (2000) described intrinsic case study as one in which “the researcher wants better understanding of this particular case. It is not undertaken because it represents other cases but because the case itself is of interest” (p.437). In this study, the bounded system (Stake, 1995; Stake, 2000) was the Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC) at WU. To obtain a better understanding of the USRC, I contacted and interviewed staff, undocumented students, and allies. In the following section, I introduce the site where the study took place and the basis for its selection

Site Selection

This study was conducted at Westside University, a four-year, comprehensive, public institution. I was intrinsically interested in Westside University’s USRC for the following reasons: 1) It has a large undocumented student enrollment; 2) the institution established the USRC several years ago² as

² Exact years are not provided to protect the identity of the institution and participants of the study.

a result of advocacy efforts by students and staff; and 3) the undocumented student population is expected to grow. As this student population increases, the need to support them in their educational journey becomes even more important.

Westside University is a regional, Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). WU is considered a mid-size campus that serves a diverse student body and community. The undocumented student population at Westside University represents approximately 2% to 3% of its total enrollment. This accounts for several hundred self-identified undocumented students at the institution.

Participants

The principal participants in the study were undocumented students, USRC staff, and allies at Westside University. In order to begin the study, I submitted an application to conduct research to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Westside University. Included in the IRB application were a recruitment flier for students (Appendix A), a recruitment flier for allies (Appendix G), and an informed consent form (Appendix B). The institution's name and contact information on recruitment flyers has been de-identified. Recruitment materials were disseminated and posted around campus to invite potential participants.

Undocumented Student Resource Center Staff

Staff participants were full-time and part-time staff employed at the USRC. The staff must have been employed at the USRC a minimum of six months. I established this requirement to ensure staff members were familiar with the

campus, its students, and the services the USRC provided. To recruit potential staff participants, I searched the Westside University website and directory. Once I identified the USRC staff, I sent them an email invitation with a brief overview of the research to solicit their participation in the study. Upon receiving an affirmative response to my initial email invitation, I confirmed their participation and attached the informed consent form to this communication. See Appendix B for copy of informed consent form and Appendix F for the email message invitation.

Undocumented Students

Student participants included self-identified undocumented, undergraduate (first-year and community college transfers) and graduate students including both DACA and non-DACA recipients enrolled at the institution as well as undocumented students who graduated within one academic year from Westside University. I believe it was important to include undocumented students at different stages of their college enrollment to obtain a complete picture of the impact of the USRC as well as a rich understanding of the role the USRC played in their college journey, if any. As noted above, the recruitment process for student participants consisted of designing a flier that was posted at various locations within the research site where students congregate; specifically, affinity group spaces. See Appendix A for sample flier. The flier and informed consent contained all pertinent information related to the study so that participants could make an informed decision when choosing to participate.

I identified the student participants for the study through snowball, chain or network sampling (one type of purposeful sampling designs) described by Glesne (2011) as a way of obtaining prospective participants from individuals who know people who meet research interests. Related to snowball sampling, I also asked those students whom I interviewed to ask other students they knew and who met the inclusion criteria, to contact me. While this selection process may not be sufficient, it was an appropriate strategy for this research study due to the sensitive nature of the participants' immigration status, which makes this population vulnerable and difficult to reach.

Allies

For the purpose of this study, allies referred to particular "individuals who work from a position of authority, power, or influence to impact others' lives positively by challenging systems of oppression" (Broido, 2000; Washington & Evans, 1991) as cited by Chen and Rhoads (2016, p. 517). The flier to recruit potential allies sought any staff, faculty, or administrator who considered themselves allies of the undocumented community. See Appendix G for the ally recruitment flier. All the allies in this study participated in at least one USRC program or project, assisted with planning an USRC event, or served in a volunteer role with the USRC within the last twelve months. The flier contained my contact information so they could contact me if they were interested in participating in the study. I also asked the USRC staff for referrals. The approved flier was also posted at the USRC and on bulletin boards around the

campus. Once potential participants contacted me expressing their interest in the study, I sent them an email communication (Appendix F) and the informed consent form (Appendix B).

Data Collection

To provide a descriptive, detailed, and rich understanding of the role of the USRC in undocumented students' experience and persistence at Westside University, I collected data from the following sources: (1) semi-structured interviews; (2) documents; and (3) participant observations. These data sources and data collection methods are discussed below.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with a total of twenty-four participants. Twenty interviews were conducted in person and four by telephone. As outlined by Alvesson (2011) semi-structured interviews are about obtaining rich accounts and authentic experiences. I chose to use semi-structured interviews because they provide more detailed information than other data collection method (Woods, 2011). Another advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they enable reciprocity between the interviewer and participant (Galletta, 2012), providing the interviewer with the opportunity to devise follow-up questions based on the responses given by the participants (Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). Keller and Conradin (2019) indicated, "semi-structured interviews are conducted with a fairly open framework, which allow for focused, conversational, two-way communication. They can be used both to give

and receive information” (p. 1). Semi-structured interviews allow participants to “express their views in their own terms” (Keller & Conradin, 2019, p. 1).

Additionally, as described by Longhurst (2003) semi-structured interviewing is about talking but it is also

. . . about listening. It is about paying attention. It is about being open to hear what people have to say. It is about being nonjudgmental. It is about creating a comfortable environment for people to share. It is about being careful and systematic with the things people tell you. (p. 103)

I intentionally selected to interview staff, self-identified undocumented students, and allies because they are in direct contact with the USRC and its services. As such, I believe they assisted me to undertake the purpose of this study.

The interview protocol that I used for this research study consisted of a set of different interview questions for each group of participants. See Appendix C, Appendix D, and Appendix E for interview protocols. Specifically, the semi-structured interviews lasted between 20-35 minutes per research participant. Upon their agreement to participate, I scheduled the interview in a format, time and location of their choice. During our meeting and prior to the start of the interview, I also reviewed the interview protocol with each participant to ensure they understood the purpose of the study and to let them know that they could opt out at any time. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed in their entirety by a secure transcription service.

Participants in the study were asked a series of open-ended questions with the intent to gather rich responses. During the interview process, my focus was to listen carefully to capture the participants' experiences with the USRC during their enrollment at Westside University. A key component of interviewing is listening as a tool to gain insight into the lives of individuals (Seidman, 2013).

Participants Profile

Table 1. illustrates the demographics of the twenty-four participants in my study, which included 14 self-identified undocumented students, three staff members, and seven allies. The demographics include their names (pseudonyms), students' class standing (if applicable), which refers to the level they enrolled at the institution when they first entered, role within the institution, and gender. To maintain confidentiality and honor the integrity of the study, USRC staff members are identified and included in the ally group.

Documents

For this study, I also analyzed documents from multiple sources in attempts to gain a better understanding of the role of the Undocumented Student Resource Center at Westside University. The documents assisted me to fill in gaps in the study and compose interview questions. For example, by reviewing social media platforms I was able to identify events where I could attend and conduct observations. In addition, I was able to ask participants about their experience at these events and also observe the students and families' interactions at the events I attended. These documents included: (1) the USRC

mission; (2) USRC website; (3) USRC promotional materials and event fliers; (4) social media platforms; (5) staff job descriptions; and (6) university strategic plan.

Table 1. Participant Demographics.

Name (Pseudonym)	Class Level	Role	Gender
Sofia	First-Year	Undergrad Student	F
Rebeca	Transfer	Undergrad Student	F
Jaime	Transfer	Undergrad Student	M
Julia	First-Year	Recent Graduate	F
Daniela	Transfer	Undergrad Student	F
Isabel	First-Year	Undergrad Student	F
Camila	Transfer	Undergrad Student	F
Arturo	First-Year	Undergrad Student	M
Aracely	Transfer	Undergrad Student	F
Irma	First-Year	Undergrad Student	F
Martha	Transfer	Graduate Student	F
Lily	Transfer	Recent Graduate	F
Norma	First-Year	Recent Graduate	F
Victoria	Transfer	Graduate Student	F
Rocio	Ally -	Staff	F
Javier	Ally –	Staff	M
Alma	Ally –	Staff	F
Alejandra	Ally	Faculty	F
Pedro	Ally –	Administrator	M
Blanca	Ally	Staff	F
Belen	Ally –	Staff	F

Roberto	Ally –	Staff	M
Miguel	Ally	Administrator	M
Gabriela	Ally –	Staff	F

Furthermore, the document analysis helped me to gain a deeper understanding about the USRC's work, its content, and its services to students and the community.

In Table 2. (adapted from Martinez, 2014), I list the documents I analyzed and provide the rationale for each document as well as the questions that helped guide my analysis.

Table 2. Rationale for Document Analysis.

Document	Code	Rationale	Guiding Analytical Questions
USRC Mission Statement	MS	Values, goals and objectives	What is the mission of the USRC? Do programs align with mission?
Website	WS	Accessibility,	Is the website easily updates, events, accessible to and programs students and community? What information is available on website? How is the USRC's identity portrayed?
Promotional Materials	PM	Access, visibility, presence, events and programs	What is the message the USRC is trying to convey and fliers to stakeholders? What programs are being offered and how often? Who is the targeted audience? What is the USRC identity?
Social Media	SM	Access, visibility, presence	How visible is the USRC? What messages are sent?
Campus Strategic	SP	Values, goals,	How does the USRC

Plan

objectives and
alignment

fit into the campus plan?
How is the campus supporting
undocumented students?

By analyzing the aforementioned documents, I was able to gain additional insights into the role of the USRC. In addition, this data source helped me to achieve triangulation and establish trustworthiness, which I will present later in this chapter.

Observations

Finally, I conducted observations at the USRC and in other settings including programs and events sponsored by the USRC. I obtained permission to do the observations and take notes prior to each program or activity. The observations were conducted over a three-month period from July 2019 to September 2019. I observed a total of 10 events or programs as follows: one tutoring session, one legal services training session, two peer mentor appointments, two writing sessions, one ally training, two family welcome and orientation programs, and one parent engagement session. The goal of these observations was to capture the way students and families interacted with the USRC; how they utilized the USRC; what type of services they sought; and their overall experiences. Glesne (2011) presents the “participant –observation continuum” (pp. 64-65) to describe the four different observation positions a researcher may place themselves. Given the purpose of my study, I envisioned myself moving through all four roles, which include: observer, observer as participant, participant as observer, and full participant (Glesne, 2011). For instance, during a tutoring session for which I obtained consent from participants

to observe, I placed myself in the observer role. In this capacity, I observed only. I took notes and did not interact with any of the participants. Conversely, at a writing group session where I sat with potential participants, I took the role of observer as participant because as I anticipated, I interacted with the students in the session. In the role of participant as observer, I became more involved in the “everyday world of the researched” (Glesne, 2011, p. 65) which provides more opportunity to learn. This occurred when I attended a training hosted by the USRC regarding legal services for undocumented students. Finally, in the full participant role, I simultaneously functioned as an ally of the undocumented immigrant community and the researcher. For instance, I participated and observed welcome day and orientation programs, which provided parents and families of new students with information on what to expect as their students, entered the university. Furthermore, I fully engaged in the full participant role during the second writing session I observed. Along with the participants, during this writing session, I engaged with the group and followed the writing prompts. I also shared my writing with the group when it was my turn. This provided the participants and me with the opportunity to share our thoughts and connect on a more intimate level. Most importantly, it also helped to establish trust.

As stated by Glesne (2011), “the main outcome of participant observation is to better understand the research setting, its participants, and their behavior” (p. 66). In the participant observation process, the “researcher observes, systematically experiences, and consciously records in detail the many aspects

of a situation” (Glesne 2011, p. 67). To that end, I took copious notes during my observations. Field notes assisted me to describe what participants were doing and saying in a particular setting and how they interacted with others (Glesne, 2011). According to Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (as cited in Glesne, 2011, p. 71) “without writing the sharp, incisive details about people, places and cultures are lost to us.” Consequently, maintaining field notes was critical in my observation process. In my observations, I took descriptive and analytic notes, which strive for accuracy, concreteness, and avoid judgment (Glesne, 2011).

It is important to point out, that descriptive notes do not analyze or explain, they only describe (Glesne, 2011). On the other hand, analytical notes go beyond descriptions of what the researcher sees and hears (Glesne, 2011). Through the process of analytic notes, I reflected on the notes I wrote. I wrote field notes both during my observations and afterwards to ensure I captured what occurred during the sessions accurately.

Finally, I also relied on autobiographical notes, which as described by Glesne (2011) are a record of my behavior and emotions as a researcher throughout the study. Autobiographical notes are intentional and reflect the thoughts that situate the researcher within the research process (Glesne, 2011). This process included personal notes, which reflected my experiences and thoughts as the study progressed.

As noted earlier, I chose these data collection methods because they provide a comprehensive view of a specific case or entity (Marrelli, 2007) and

because as a researcher, I intended to develop an in-depth understanding (Stake, 2000) of the role of the USRC in the college journey of undocumented students. To ensure confidentiality, the audio recordings and all documents related to the study were stored in a locked cabinet located in my office. None of the documents contained any participant identifying information. All participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Through the duration of the study, I did not expose participants to any risks. To limit any potential risks, I was considerate of the duration of the interview, the number of interview questions, and reviewed the interview protocol to ensure participants were clear about the purpose of the study and to respond to any questions they might have. I provided participants with the option to choose the location of the interview to ensure it was a space where they felt comfortable. I made certain that the interview location was free of any distractions. In addition, participants also had the option to select the format of the interview such as face-to-face or telephone. It was critically important to provide participants with these options to maximize their engagement (Seidman, 2013).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was a continuous process throughout the study. The data collected through interviews, documents, and observations were coded and analyzed manually (Saldaña, 2016). After the data collection and transcription process was completed, I followed Saldaña's (2016) code-to-theory model for

qualitative research by employing the following steps: (1) coding the data; (2) categorizing the data; and (3) theming the data (p.14). I utilized various coding methods, including In Vivo Coding, Emotion Coding, and Deductive Coding.

In Vivo Coding allowed me to use the participants' own language to craft their own unique stories related to the USRC rather than capturing the essence of them (Saldaña, 2016). According to Saldaña (2016), In Vivo codes "can also provide imagery, symbols, and metaphors for rich category, theme, and concept development" (p. 109). As noted above, I also employed Emotion Coding and Deductive Coding. Emotion coding helped me to capture the feelings expressed by participants during the interview as they shared their experiences. Saldaña (2016) stated, "Emotion coding labels the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant, or inferred by the researcher about the participant" (p. 125). Also, "It provides insight into the participants' perspectives worldviews, and life conditions" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 293).

Deductive coding involved pre-determined codes that were derived from my theoretical framework (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), Undocumented Critical Theory (UndocuCrit). As previously stated, UndocuCrit is a relatively new theory that aims to gain a better understanding of the experiences of undocumented communities (Aguilar, 2018). Specifically, Aguilar (2018) presents the four tenets of UndocuCrit as follows: (1) Fear is endemic among immigrant communities; (2) Different experiences of liminality translate into different experiences of reality; (3) Parental sacrificios become a form of capital;

and (4) Acompañamiento is the embodiment of mentorship, academic redemption, and community engagement. These four tenets served as my deductive/pre-existing codes. At the same time, I did not allow my conceptual framework to constrain my analysis.

Trustworthiness

I increased the trustworthiness of my work by employing several strategies. First, I achieved triangulation through the various data sources I discussed previously (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). According to Glesne (2011), triangulation is a practice that relies on a variety of methods and sources to obtain data. Furthermore, triangulation is a way to “validate” claims (p. 47). In addition, through the triangulation process, the researcher is “trying to understand the multiple perspectives available” (Glesne, 2011, p. 47). Second, I was conscientious of my subjectivities. I achieved this by keeping a “reflective journal” (Glesne, 2011, p. 213) and I was also intentional about maintaining my subjectivities in check so that they did not influence my data analysis (Glesne, 2011). To aid with this process, I relied on a “critical friend” (Gordon, 2006; Hardiman & Dewing, 2014) to offer an external lens and provide feedback. As cited in Swaffield (2004) a critical friend has been described by Costa and Kallick (1993) as “a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend” (p. 1). In this study, my committee chair served as my critical friend. Third, I engaged in member-checking by presenting the data and transcriptions

to the participants in the study so that they could confirm their stories and findings were accurate (Merriam, 1998). Once I completed my analysis and the interviews were conducted and transcribed, I provided each participant with a copy to review, offer comments, and ensure accuracy. Furthermore, after the study was conducted, I debriefed with several participants and presented the findings of my research during visits to the USRC. Finally, I provided rich, thick descriptions defined by Geertz (1973) as cited in Glesne (2011) as “description that goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act (thin description), but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” (Denzin, 1989a, p.39) as cited in Glesne (2011). I also used the notes from my reflective journal to help me increase the level of trustworthiness.

My Subjectivities

I recognize that my identity as a Mexican immigrant and educator influences the process of this study. As an educator and researcher, I am aware of the challenges faced by undocumented students in this country and in Southern California specifically. Therefore, I approached my research through an asset-based lens. I am an advocate for undocumented immigrants. I have personal and professional experiences with this population both in urban and agricultural settings. I have worked alongside them for several years and continue to do so in a school setting and in the community. I also recognize that

I am very empathetic to the undocumented population and this may surface throughout my research process.

As an educator for many years, I have first-hand knowledge of the struggles faced by undocumented students, the systemic structures that exist in our schools and also ways that can assist them succeed. These experiences afford me the opportunity to understand the obstacles, dreams and motivation of the undocumented community. Finally, I also recognize that while I am an immigrant, I was not undocumented when I arrived in this country as a teen, which means the experiences of undocumented students are in some ways, different from mine. However, I believe we are more similar than not. I am a first-generation, Pell-eligible student that grew up in an agricultural town. My community was and still is predominantly Latinx, with low-resource schools and low-college going rates, characteristics prevalent in the undocumented community.

Through my interactions with undocumented families I have witnessed their disappointment when they are not able to support their students attend college because of the cost and lack of financial aid available to them. I have heard the students' stories and how they were discouraged by counselors and others to attend college because of their immigration status. I have seen high school transcripts of the best and brightest who were admitted to their top choice school but could not attend because they could not afford it. These stories are what motivated me to do this study. These are the stories I came across often

and while I do everything I can to help them, I believe much needs to be done. As a researcher, I am interested in learning about the role that USRCs play in the college journey of undocumented students; a population whose voice is often silenced. While I am not or have been undocumented, I have lived and worked with undocumented immigrants who worked in the fields, cleaned homes and manicured lawns. I have seen the fear in their eyes when asked where they live, I have heard the negative and derogatory discourse expressed by many and have witnessed the injustices they too often experience. I have also been part of their triumphs. I have celebrated them when they crossed the stage at commencement, I have supported them by marching alongside them, and I have cried tears of joy when they received their DACA documents, which afford them the opportunity to obtain a driver's license and work.

In order to develop trust with the participants, I was transparent and shared that I have worked with undocumented students and I am very familiar with their experiences. I also shared my identities, which could influence my work such as my ethnic background, education and beliefs prior to conducting my research. It was my hope that this would ease any anxiety the participants may have felt so that they were not reluctant to be part of the study.

Limitations

The participants' immigration status was based on self-disclosure or self-identification and this may be viewed as a limitation of my study. For both ethical and personal concerns, I did not ask students to confirm their undocumented

status. In addition, for purposes of this study, I did not differentiate between DACA and unDACAmented students. Finally, of the fourteen students who participated in the study, only two were male.

Delimitations

This study's main purpose was to explore the role an Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC) plays in the college journey of undocumented students. It was not intended to evaluate the services it provides.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the design of my qualitative intrinsic case study, which explored the role an Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC) plays in the college journey of undocumented students at Westside University, a comprehensive, four-year, public institution. This included the purpose of my study, the research questions that guided the study, the selection of the research site, the data collection process and the data analysis techniques. I also illustrated the criteria for the selection of participants, trustworthiness, my subjectivities, limitations, and delimitations. In the following chapter, I present the research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings of the study. As a reminder, the purpose of this case study was to explore the role an Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC) plays in the college journey of undocumented students at Westside University (WU). The three research questions that guided this case study were as follows: 1) How does an USRC at a four-year, public, comprehensive university influence the experiences of undocumented students, if at all?; 2) What strategies does an USRC implement to support undocumented students, if any?; and 3) How does an USRC influence the persistence of undocumented students, if at all?

Based on my analysis of the data, I constructed six overarching and interrelated themes. These themes represent the role of the USRC in the participants' college journey. The six themes I identified were: 1) Facilitating College Access; 2) Breaking Down Barriers; 3) Alleviating Fear; 4) Fostering Acompañamiento; 5) Promoting Agency and Advocacy; and 6) Advancing Post-Baccalaureate Education and Career Choice. Within each of these themes, I discuss specific strategies employed by the USRC and how they influenced undocumented student persistence. I elaborate on each of the aforementioned themes and related subthemes below.

Facilitating College Access

Findings revealed that the Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC) at Westside University helped facilitate college access. Within this context, access is narrowly defined as the opportunity to enroll in college. Collectively, first- year, transfers, recent graduates, and students in graduate programs shared the reasons they selected to attend Westside University. They consistently drew attention to the USRC and its staff. Students felt an affinity to Westside University because of the outreach and recruitment efforts carried out by the USRC, which included debunking the myth that undocumented students cannot go to college. Jaime, a transfer student, for example, reflected on his experience as he was graduating from high school. Jaime recalled:

My journey as an undocumented student has been... At the beginning was really tough. Right after I graduated high school, there was literally no help whatsoever and no one knew what to do with us. No one knew how to guide us. My counselor told me that I should just go to work because there was no future for an undocumented person in the university.

Jaime's experience was common among the undocumented students in this study. They often felt discouraged, lost, and uncertain because of the lack of support from high school teachers or counselors. The lack of knowledge on behalf of educators obstructed their college pathway and delayed their educational aspirations.

In addition to outreach efforts, students pointed to the personal connections they were able to establish with the center's staff. Overall, this theme demonstrates the positive impact information sharing and interactions with school personnel have on students' college access and college choice process (Acevedo-Gil, et al., 2015). I elaborate on my two sub-themes below: 1) Outreach and Recruitment Efforts and 2) Building Relationships.

Outreach and Recruitment Efforts

The outreach efforts and recruitment activities executed by the USRC included presentations at local high schools and community colleges where information on the college application process, admission requirements, and financial assistance were presented. Furthermore, an overview of the services and support provided by the center was also highlighted. The USRC staff also conducted these types of workshops during orientation programs for new students and conferences for counselors and school personnel. They also participated in tabling opportunities at on and off campus fairs. Student participants noted the information they received from the USRC during these outreach and recruitment activities contributed to their decision to enroll at Westside University. As evidenced by the testimonials of many of the participants, the USRC at Westside University made access to a four-year post-secondary education for undocumented first-year and transfer students a reality. Isabel, for example, a first-year student, shared that when she was a junior in high school a representative of Westside University came to her school and

conducted a presentation about the campus and the resources available to support undocumented students' succeed. Isabel detailed her experience as illustrated below:

The university representative came to my school to give us information about the center and the resources that they offer students. So, I kept in contact with them. Because I was undocumented, I was like, I want to have someone to support me. I feel like they and the center would be the best option for me. So that was my main reason why I chose to come here as a freshman.

As Isabel's comment suggests, the information she received from the USRC staff at WU provided her with the encouragement she needed to make an informed decision regarding college choice. Most importantly, Isabel pointed to the connection she felt with the school representatives and the resources provided by the USRC as the main factors that contributed to her college decision.

Furthermore, Lily, a recent graduate of Westside University, echoed the experiences expressed by Isabel. Lily stated that prior to transferring to WU, her community college counselor referred her to the staff at the USRC and asked her to contact them to find out how she could be supported. Lily recalled:

I remember my counselor at [said community college] said contact, I believe her name is [said name]. My counselor said "Email [said name], go in there check it out, see what they have." And I did, [said name] was amazing. It was great.

Lily's comment speaks to not only the support offered by the USRC, but also the visibility of the USRC in the community, the connections staff develop with educators at other schools, and the recognition of the work it conducts as part of its outreach efforts. Camila, another transfer student also expressed, "my visit to the USRC and the interaction with the staff was great." Camila elaborated:

At first, I wasn't really sure if I wanted to go there for sure, but after visiting, I felt welcomed and I felt like I was being helped. I just felt you know like, that was the perfect school for me.

The comments expressed by Isabel, Lily, and Camila affirm that undocumented students rely on the advice and information of professional staff and the support system they can provide when making decisions regarding their college journey (Pérez et al., 2010). Their narratives also underscore the importance of creating a welcoming environment for students and fostering a sense of belonging.

Indeed, the center went beyond simply providing information. The center actively helped students navigate the admissions process. They helped students apply for admissions and financial assistance. During my visits to the USRC, I came across fliers announcing grant opportunities and information on scholarships made available to students. The fliers outlined the title of the program or event, date, time, and location. One example was the California DREAM Act drop-in hours. This session was facilitated by the center's staff to help students complete and submit their California DREAM Act application during

the priority filing period of October to March. Furthermore, announcements were posted on the USRC's social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram. In addition, the event announcements and fliers I reviewed during the document analysis process supported the stories shared by participants during my interviews.

Additional outreach efforts included undocumented training workshops. I had the opportunity to observe an undocumented training workshop, which was hosted for both K-12 and higher education leaders. The USRC staff encouraged educational leaders to reach out if they needed assistance or if they came across an undocumented student who needed help. The presenters provided an overview on the evolution of immigration legislation at the state and federal level. They also highlighted the benefits some students are eligible for, a list of scholarships undocumented students can apply to, and recommendations for educators on how they can assist this student population. During this time, I also came to learn that a community college faculty member who had participated in the undocumented training workshop previously, took what he learned back to his own campus and garnered support to successfully establish an undocumented student resource center.

Through its outreach and recruitment efforts, its services to students and families, and collaborative endeavors, the USRC is a prime example of being a student-centered space. All but one participant spoke highly of the center and its work. Irma, a student who entered the university as a first-year student,

mentioned that the center does “good but could do better”. She indicated the center could advocate more for undocumented students and promote its programs widely.

Building Relationships

Building trusting relationships with school personnel is imperative for undocumented students’ success in their educational trajectory (Gonzales, Heredia & Negrón-Gonzales, 2015). As previously stated, through their outreach efforts including school visits, information sessions on financial aid and scholarships, presentations during orientation programs, and workshops on relevant topics including “Disclosing Your Immigration Status”³ and “Dating While Undocumented,” the USRC has been able to establish relationships with students from their very first interaction. Martha, a current graduate student, who enrolled as a community college transfer, expressed that it was the referral she received from a friend to visit the USRC’s staff that convinced her that she could go to college. Subsequently, Martha transferred to Westside University. She explained:

I was one of them [undocumented] that I thought because of my immigration status I couldn’t go to college. But I mean, they changed my mindset. I went to the campus before even starting my bachelor’s to check out the center and the resources it had to offer. And that’s why I decided to go here, because the staff at the center made me feel

³ Names of programs and events have been changed to protect the identity of the institution.

comfortable going here and they also helped me find scholarships even before coming here. I was comfortable to ask the staff anything.

As evidenced by Martha's testimonial, the connection she had with her friend enabled her to contact the center and visit with the staff. Martha was able to capitalize on their knowledge to make the transition from her local community college to the university. Without the human interaction and personal touch Martha received from the staff at the USRC, it is unlikely she would have enrolled at Westside University. It is also probable that Martha's friend had developed a personal relationship and positive experience with the USRC staff, which is the reason she referred Martha to the center. Isabel also spoke about the notion that she would not have been able to attend college without the center's support. Specifically, she attributed her decision to attend WU because she felt the center's staff demonstrated a high regard for undocumented students, shared a common understanding and built trust. Isabel recalled:

At the beginning they [teachers] told me, "Oh, you are not going to be able to go to college because you're undocumented, so you're not going to make it." Or even because of my English. They would say, "Oh, you have an accent, so you're not going to make it." They were even telling me, "Oh, if you do, probably you're going to go to a community college." But now I'm here. I'm at a four year. So I'm excited, and I'm thankful to God and everything for the opportunities that they are giving me. And also I feel like the center, I would say that that was the main reason why I came here,

because I was like, I'm going to have someone to support me there. So I was like, I'm going go there because I feel good. I was like, this is where I want to go.

These intentional efforts, supportive staff and social networks, have resulted in students' access to resources, and building trusting relationships with the USRC staff and their peers alike. In addition to helping students make informed decisions about college choices and enrolling at a four-year university, the USRC staff played a key role in making students feel welcomed. Most importantly, the relationships the staff established with students from the beginning, provided them with a shared sense of identity, and helped them build trust and respect among each other.

Breaking Down Barriers

Given many systemic and structural barriers, undocumented students encounter multiple obstacles as they navigate their daily lives (Morrison et al., 2016). One of the main reasons why undocumented students cannot access higher education is the limited eligibility for financial assistance, as they do not qualify for federal financial aid. In addition, the lack of information about access to in-state tuition programs prevents them from pursuing enrollment at post-secondary institutions (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). In the following subsections, I discuss the financial and educational barriers experienced by students, strategies to alleviate these barriers, the adverse climate some students encountered, and

ways the USRC worked to break them down in order to promote student persistence.

Financial Challenges

As previously noted, limited financial assistance is one of the major concerns of the undocumented student population (Abrego, 2006; Diaz-Strong et al., 2011). In many cases, the cost of college prohibits students from enrolling in school beyond high school (Pérez et al., 2010; Enriquez et al., 2019) and completing their degrees despite state and institutional support. This rings true in every story shared by the participants in this study. Unequivocally, all student participants identified the lack of financial resources due to their immigration status as the most pressing issue they encountered in their pursuit of higher education.

Victoria, a second year graduate student shared that due to the lack of financial opportunities available to her during her community college enrollment, earning her associates degree and subsequently transferring to Westside University was an arduous journey. Victoria recalled:

First, money, money is a big issue because if I don't have money, I can't go to school. That's why it took me approximately [8-10 years]⁴ to get my associates and another three to get my bachelor's. Back then, we didn't even have the California Dream Act. I qualified for AB540, but even if I was at a community college, I had to pay everything out of pocket. Also

⁴ Exact years are not provided to protect the participant's identity.

scholarships, there is lack of scholarships that I could apply for because everything was for residents or citizens.

Victoria's comment aligns with the literature in that in-state tuition programs while helpful, are not sufficient when undocumented students pursue a post-secondary education (Conger & Chellman, 2013). Without financial assistance, college is out of reach for many undocumented students (Abrego, 2006). Sofia, a returning student also recalled the challenges she faced because of limited financial resources and the need to help her family with expenses. Undocumented families are challenged financially because they often live below the poverty level (Morrison et al., 2016), reside in crowded apartments, feel unsafe in the areas where they live, and are exposed to poor educational conditions in their schools (Abrego, 2006; Pérez et al., 2010). Given these factors, many families depend on their children to help with household expenses. Sofia conveyed her financial struggle below:

I had to work from the age of fifteen to help my mom pay half of the bills at home. Because of financial and my immigration status, I was not able to continue my studies, at that time. And then coming to school now, even now, there's so many challenges, that I have to face as a single mother, financially.

Unfortunately, Sofia's story is not uncommon among the undocumented student population. From an early age, Sofia had to work to assist with her family's financial obligations, which made it difficult for her to make school a

priority. Although she has returned to school, Sofia still has financial difficulties. As previously stated, Westside University students' access to college is restricted because they do not qualify for federal financial assistance and have to work full-time to help their families and save money for school. Jaime's story is very similar to Victoria's and Sofia's in a variety of ways. All three are students who due to the financial challenges they faced took longer to transfer or stopped out and then returned to school. Jaime provided insight into this global financial issue affecting undocumented students and communities:

The problem that I had and I believe every undocumented student has, is the resources to pay for school. Because of financial and my immigration status, I was not able to continue my studies, but I am back now. I believe most of the undocumented community struggles. It's monetary.

As previously stated, the lack of financial assistance made the WU college journey challenging. Not being eligible for financial aid or scholarships limited their opportunities in ways that did not affect their documented peers. Jaime's revelation speaks to how the lack of financial resources delays many undocumented students' academic goals because often they have to stop out to earn enough money to continue their enrollment. Furthermore, Rebeca, Julia, Daniela, and Lily also mentioned their own struggles and the strain they felt due to lack of funding available to them. Rebeca recalled:

The biggest challenge I faced was financial. And I think that applies to a lot of people. Prior to transferring to this university, it took me longer to do

so because at the time I only had one parent working. I was unemployed at the time so it was very difficult for me to get three or four courses a semester, and sometimes I would not even be able to go to school that particular semester.

For Rebeca, the fact that her Dad was the sole provider for her family and the reality that as an undocumented student, she cannot work, limited her ability to make academic progress. Correspondingly, Daniela expressed her concern about financing her education beyond high school when she became fully aware that she was not eligible for financial assistance. Daniela noted:

When I realized that I didn't qualify for any financial aid, I said, if I don't qualify for financial aid, how am I going to go to college? Being undocumented and being from a low-income family, going to college was not even there. I did not have a financial support system.

Similar to Rebeca's story, Daniela, also a transfer student, acknowledged that her immigration status and low-socioeconomic background restricted her ability to enroll in college. Lily and Julia also faced financial challenges. Lily referred to feeling lost because she was not able to receive any type of financial aid. Julia noted that the financial opportunities for undocumented students are very limited. She said: "A lot of times, we have to take out loans and we need a co-signer and that co-signer sometimes needs to be a citizen". The experiences these students shared illustrate the dearth of financial assistance available to undocumented students.

Similarly, faculty, allies, and staff recounted stories of students who visited with them and revealed their financial challenges. They were keenly aware about the deficiency in funding for undocumented students and the challenges it creates for this student population. Javier, a staff member and ally, advocated for more financial resources to assist students. “A lot of students' worries have to do with paying for college. Paying for college already is very stressful. So we need to offer more scholarships.” Javier’s advocacy to provide students with scholarships is a strategy to help garner support and provide students with some relief from the stress the lack of financial assistance brings to these students. Likewise, Alma, another staff member and ally shared her perspective:

Some of the challenges undocumented students face are money because the little money that they do have, they use it to help their family members. Also, we need to think about other undocumented students. For example, non-DACA recipients face challenges because they are unable to work.

In addition to emphasizing the difficulties undocumented students encounter due to limited financial resources, Alma discussed the need to be more thoughtful about other undocumented students whose struggles may be more challenging because they are not eligible to work. During my interview with Alma she shared the work the USRC and campus allies are doing to raise funds for emergency grants for undocumented students some of whom are non-DACA recipients and whose financial opportunities are even more limited. In the

following section, I present the additional strategies the USRC has implemented to alleviate the financial barriers faced by undocumented students.

Strategies to Alleviate Financial Barriers

The USRC alleviated some of the financial burdens students encountered by: 1) conducting financial aid workshops including, DREAM Act and AB540 sessions and identifying scholarship opportunities; 2) hosting fundraising events and offering emergency grants; and 3) helping students find jobs and employment opportunities. I elaborate on each of these strategies below.

Financial Aid and Scholarship Workshops

Student participants spoke regarding the financial opportunities they learned about and the relief they felt when they received financial assistance in the form of in-state tuition programs, scholarships, and grants. Rebeca was thankful for the opportunities afforded to her as she recalled:

Luckily, I was awarded a scholarship and that has helped me so much, and I was able to find employment at this university and then again that has helped me as well. The center provides various resources but most importantly, it provides a lot of financial information that is usually top priority. And it offers, for example, information on the California DREAM Act, AB540, the affidavit.

In her statement, Rebeca referred to a two-year scholarship she received from a national organization who offers funding to undocumented first-year and transfer students enrolling at a partner college. The USRC assisted Rebeca to

secure the scholarship by ensuring she met the acceptance deadline, enrolled in classes at Westside University, and met the criteria to renew the scholarship for a second year. Jaime reflected on his hesitation to ask for help regarding financial aid but decided to seek assistance from the USRC team. Below is the experience he shared:

At the beginning, I was a little bit hesitant on asking for help, and my first quarter was a little bit tough because I was paying out of pocket and I didn't want to say I was not getting financial aid, but then I came to talk to the staff at the center. And then they helped me out step by step. This is what we're going to do, this is what we're going to ask. This is what you're going to tell them. This is what they're going to answer you and this is how we're going to get your money. Fortunately, I was able to get the money back [that he had paid out of pocket] and it was easier, it became so much easier to be at school without the burden of how am I going to pay for school next quarter.

As Jaime expressed, the USRC guided and advocated for him so that the burden of paying for school lessened. Through their network connections and their prior knowledge about financial aid and scholarships, the staff at the USRC were able to provide insight and assist Jaime to resolve his financial dilemma.

In addition to workshops on how to pay for college, the USRC with the assistance of a recent graduate, designed a scholarship guide to provide current information on scholarships to undocumented students. Martha's interactions

with the center provided her with support and funding from multiple sources in the form of scholarships and grants. Martha explained:

They gave me different tips on how to get scholarships and all that other stuff. So then I applied for the [said name] Scholarship, and I got it. They also update the scholarship board and when it's time to fill out the DREAM Act, they have those days where they block appointments, so students will go in with their laptop to get help to fill out the DREAM Act application.

The scholarship guide several student participants mentioned is a monthly calendar posted on one of the USRC's walls. The calendar has twelve "pockets" with each month written above the opening. Each "pocket" contains scholarship opportunities for that particular month. During one of my observations, I saw students coming into the USRC and going straight to the scholarship guide. They would take a slip of paper containing scholarship information from the current or subsequent months. Some months had more information than others did and there were a few where there were no slips of paper at all. This could be because the deadlines had passed or there were no scholarship opportunities for that particular month. During my observation of a financial aid and scholarship workshop, I was able to see firsthand how the USRC staff provided students and families with resources to help them pay for school. The scholarship guide posted at the USRC contains information on local, regional and national scholarships where immigration status is not part of the qualification criteria. This

scholarship guide reinforced the USRC's efforts to dispel the notion that undocumented students cannot go to college.

Furthermore, the USRC has collaborated with departments on campus to identify ways to assist undocumented students financially. Alma commented:

Departments on campus have opened up scholarship opportunities for students. They have opened up job opportunities for non-DACA recipients or research opportunities. After attending an ally training, a faculty member was able to change the scholarship criteria for the [said department] to include California DREAM Act applicants. Other faculty members have also offered research opportunities to non-DACA students.

As evidenced by Alma's comment, the USRC has been able to expand financial opportunities for undocumented students. In the examples Alma shared, the center's ally training assisted faculty to be more inclusive in their scholarship criteria. Prior to including California DREAM Act applicants, the scholarship eligibility required applicants to be U.S. citizens or permanent residents. In addition, because non-DACA recipients are not able to work, some faculty have offered several students the opportunity to do research. In return, students receive a scholarship or a textbook grant. It is through the efforts of the USRC that these types of collaborations have come to fruition. In attempts to raise awareness and maximize the financial aid opportunities available to undocumented students, the USRC also hosts workshops on the California DREAM Act.

California DREAM Act

In addition to supporting and guiding students who encounter difficulties with their financial aid, the USRC provides sessions on the California DREAM Act application. Isabel also expressed the anxiety she felt about the possibility of not attending school because of financial limitations and how the USRC helped ease away that feeling:

I thought I wasn't going to be able to come to school because I thought, Oh, I'm not going to have the financial aid and all that. But then I heard that there was the DREAM Act that was offered for undocumented students, so that was the opportunity that they offered to me. The center has been a helpful tool for me. They helped me with the DREAM Act. They helped me every year to renew it, and they helped me with the other types of scholarships that are offered for undocumented students. We go there because they update the new scholarships every month so we go see which new scholarship we can apply to.

For Isabel, the guidance she received to complete the DREAM Act application and the opportunities to apply for scholarships advertised on the board, have provided her with financial resources to make attending college possible. Because of the USRC's continuous commitment to assist students find resources and opportunities to pay for school, student participants like Julia expressed their gratitude. Julia mentioned, "The center staff did research with me and helped me find resources for financial aid." Correspondingly, Daniela

conveyed her experience, “I go there to get more information; I feel that they always try to help you in any issue that you might have like “Hey, I need help with financial aid.” The USRC assisted students with the financial aid process from beginning to end as Aracely commented, “The center helped me to apply for financial aid and I got it”. The comments expressed by Jaime, Isabel, Daniela Julia and Aracely reflect the USRC’s commitment, support and guidance to ease their financial challenges. During one of my visits to the USRC, I had the opportunity to come across fliers announcing drop-in hours for students to fill out the California DREAM Act application. Additionally, the USRC announces their financial aid and scholarship workshops in their social media platforms. It is evident that providing resources on how to pay for school is one of the center’s top priorities.

Although I did not observe a California DREAM Act application workshop, based on the flier I collected titled “California DREAM Act”, the USRC dedicated a significant amount of time helping students fill out and submit the application. The flier contained dates (at least two days a week) when the USRC offers drop-in hours for students to come into the center and complete their DREAM Act application by the priority deadline of March 2. I examined the application and based on the questions students and families have to answer, it can be cumbersome and confusing. Specifically, the sections related to family income and residency or immigration status (California Student Aid Commission, 2019).

Fundraising and Emergency Grants

Just like students felt supported by the USRC, staff and allies expressed the commitment the center and some departments across the university have demonstrated to provide financial support to undocumented students by hosting fundraising events and awarding emergency grants. The USRC's fundraising efforts include inviting faculty and staff to support undocumented students by contributing via payroll deduction, hosting an annual race, soliciting sponsorships, and conducting an art auction. Faculty and staff have the opportunity to select the USRC as a designated department to receive a monthly contribution from their salaries. The annual race hosted by the USRC invites local businesses to serve as sponsors at different funding levels. In return, sponsors' names are listed on the event's t-shirt, and are announced throughout the event. In collaboration with one of the academic departments, the USRC hosts a silent art auction in which attendees bid on paintings made by students, campus and community members. All funds raised through these events, are earmarked to provide emergency grants to undocumented students. Alma provided details about the USRC's efforts and collaborations as she explained: "Financial support for the students is through fundraising and grants that we can apply for and collaborating with Advancement to see what we can do." The USRC has been proactive in identifying ways to fundraise dollars for grants that assist undocumented students experiencing financial challenges. One way the center is able to assist students financially is by providing two types of

emergency grants. They offer the general emergency grant in the amount of \$300 and the legal fees emergency grant in the amount of \$500. These grant opportunities and their criteria are posted in the USRC's website. Another strategy the center has implemented to assist students in need of financial resources is through fundraising. Alma also indicated the center staff seeks opportunities to submit proposals for state and national grants. In fact, document analysis and news postings revealed the center was awarded a grant to support and elevate existing efforts. Besides the financial barriers undocumented students encountered, they also faced challenges in the classroom due to their immigration status.

Adverse Campus Climate

Undocumented students at Westside University shared some of the hostility they encountered with faculty when they found out the students were undocumented. Jaime for example, spoke about an experience he had with a faculty member. Jaime expressed:

I had one incident with a professor that was... did not agree with my [undocumented] status, but did not look at me as less. He was challenging and even a little bit more challenging than I would expect it because he knew my status and he said, "Oh, you want to work hard? Let's see how hard you can work." I took it as a challenge and at the end of the day, even though at the beginning of this class he didn't agree with my status,

at the end of the class I know he kinda look at me as okay, they're not that bad. Which I actually enjoyed. And I was proud of.

This horrible experience speaks to the professor's prejudice and anti-immigrant stance. Jaime however, used this situation to demonstrate his ability to work hard and faced adversity with great resolve. He turned what could have been a deterrent into an opportunity to illustrate that undocumented students can perform academically and showed resilience to overcome this negative experience. Norma, a recent graduate also recalled her classroom experience:

There's still some professors who don't understand. And I am trying to understand them, like it's not their fault that they're not knowledgeable enough. But sometimes the way some professors still use the word illegal or aliens, I feel like that's kind of wrong. Or I had a professor who knew I was a DACA student and knew that another student was a DACA student. So when we were sharing our experiences about our internships, they kind of dismissed us and it was very obvious. Because they gave other people like five, ten, minutes whereas like with me and then the other student, they were very like quick and just asked like less than like two questions. And since I did my internship with a [said official], I told her I was staying like three more weeks even after our internship was over. So she just kind of laughed and asked if the [said official] was going to pay me. And then she was just like, "Well, he at least should just give you, I don't know, an ice cream," and she started laughing. I took this

information to the dean of that department and when they followed back with me, they were like, “The professor did not mean it that way. They were not targeting you because you say you are a DACA recipient or the other student”. But for the other student and myself, it was pretty obvious. The situation Norma shared speaks to the lack of knowledge and disrespect on behalf of faculty that undocumented students contend with on a regular basis. Furthermore, it also perpetuates discrimination on students who are already marginalized.

Norma’s experience with her professor and the lack of support from the department head illuminates the hostile encounters many undocumented students deal with during their college trajectory. Norma felt discouraged, disappointed, and defeated by the indifference the head of the department showed when she brought this incident to their attention. I could see that this experience weighed heavily on Norma’s spirit. As she sat across from me during the interview, she was fidgety and her voice quivered when she shared that interaction with her professor. Norma continued:

I comprehend that not everybody is supporting us. But at least try to respect us. Like in that case, that professor, maybe they had mixed feelings about DACA students. Regardless if we're DACA recipients, they should give us the same treatment as any other student.

In her comment above, Norma called for understanding of the undocumented student population. She rightfully insisted on being treated with respect

regardless of her immigration status. Norma's request is to simply be treated the same as her peers. While there is growing support for undocumented students, the experiences shared by Jaime and Norma still occur. These negative classroom experiences have impacted students academically.

Strategies to Create a Supportive and Positive Environment

Given the challenges undocumented students face during their college experience the USRC offers undocumented trainings for faculty and staff on campus, at high schools and community colleges and in the community at large. In addition, the USRC has established a group of undocuallies from different units on campus who have attended the ally trainings and serve as liaisons to undocumented students. During one of my observations at the center, I saw members of the undocu group visit the center to talk with students, answer any questions they may have and offer support or simply socialize during their lunch hour. It was apparent students felt at ease talking with their allies by the way they interacted, laughed and shared a meal.

Academic Challenges

While student participants did not speak about the difficulties they were having in the classroom, staff mentioned the academic challenges students faced. Alma mentioned that the USRC monitors the academic progress of undocumented students and noticed some of them were struggling with classes. She noted that based on feedback from students on what would help them

succeed in the classroom, the USRC implemented peer mentoring services and a tutoring component. Alma explained:

The USRC realized there was a need for students to support each other. They would help each other by providing advice on what professors to take, what classes to enroll, opportunities to learn more including conferences, and possible scholarships. When students come into the center they socialize and build community. Also, conversations with the undocumented student club members reinforced the need for these type of services. When the grant opportunity came, the USRC determined it was a good time to advocate for these services. With the support of their peers and the expanded services provided by the USRC including peer mentoring and academic support, students are able to manage some of the negative experiences they face and that affect their academics.

Because of the interactions among students witnessed by the staff, the USRC established the peer mentoring program and tutoring services. I learned that the peer mentors work an average of 10-15 hours a week and meet with students about their academic plans. The center's Facebook page indicated tutoring is offered twice a week in the following subjects: math, biology and business administration. According to the center's staff, these subjects were identified as courses students had difficulties passing. Alma expressed the center will continue to monitor students' academic progress and has begun collaborations

with the advising office to ensure students receive accurate information and timely intervention if needed.

Strategies to Support Academics

To address some of the academic challenges undocumented students' experience, the USRC offers peer mentoring, tutoring services, and academic planning. Through these services, the USRC helps students who are having difficulty in their courses, maintain good academic standing and thus keep their financial aid, and review their academic plans. During one of my observations of a peer mentoring session at the center, the peer mentors offered their perspective and advice. Based on their own classroom experience and information they gathered from other students, they talked about which professors to take and which ones to avoid. The peer mentoring component has assisted undocumented students in several ways. It provides employment opportunities for the peer mentors and tutors and at the same time is a source of support for students that seek their help. Camila explained, "We go to the center for any help we need, with classes or with choosing the best career for us". Gabriela, one of the center's paraprofessionals also emphasized the ways in which students make use of the services the USRC provides as she explained, "Students visit the center to ask for assistance with scholarships and to get help with their homework. They offer tutoring services, help filling out school paperwork and choosing classes". Similarly, Sofia shared her experience regarding the assistance she received:

I went to the center and one of the peer mentors helped me. He put a plan together; this is how many classes you have left. He showed me how to do all kinds of stuff on the portal that I did not know. And like he's not even a math major.

Sofia indicated she chose to seek the assistance of the peer mentors at the USRC because she felt more comfortable with them and she trusted their knowledge as opposed to the professional advisors from her college. Sofia also noted that although the peer mentor from the USRC was not the same major as her, she received the guidance she needed to graduate. Sofia, a returning student, discussed that this was a completely different experience from when she first started at Westside University. Sofia recalled:

When I first started school here, it was very difficult for me. I don't even know if they had any resources for immigrants or undocumented students at that time. I remember they sent me to the International Office and they were not sure how to help me either. The first year I came back was very difficult. I couldn't get in the classes that I actually needed. So, I really wasted like a whole year. That was the year without the center.

Sofia's comment highlights the challenge she encountered when she first enrolled at WU because some faculty and staff were unaware about who undocumented students are and how to help them. By visiting the center and meeting with a peer advisor, Sofia received the assistance she needed to make progress to degree.

In similar fashion, Rebeca supported the experiences of her peers when she shared the following comment:

The center offers a peer mentoring program, which is pretty nice because you have individuals who work based on different majors and they can advise the students on what classes to take, which classes are necessary, which classes are not necessary.

Rebeca explained the importance of the peer mentors who serve a critical role in ensuring students make academic progress and not enroll in courses that will delay their graduation.

As mentioned previously, the USRC facilitates tutoring sessions for students that are experiencing academic challenges. At a tutoring session I observed, the student seeking assistance with math appeared very comfortable at the center and was attentive as the tutor explained the problem on a paper flip chart. The tutor walked and guided the student through the problem step-by-step to ensure the student understood. After about 10 minutes, the student was given a math equation and she worked out the problem with very little guidance from the tutor. As I observed the interaction between the tutor and the student, I could tell the tutor was confident in her role while explaining how to solve the problem. In return, the student felt at ease and smiled as she worked out the problem on her own. A few days later, while visiting the USRC, I came across the tutor I had observed and she shared that all the students who had attended her tutoring

sessions received over 90% on their final exams. I could tell she was very proud of the students and their academic accomplishment.

The strategies implemented by the USRC to support students academically aligns with what the literature reveals about the importance of support services aimed specifically at assisting undocumented students succeed (Pérez & Rodriguez, 2012).

The USRC was successful in securing a grant that has facilitated the employment of undocumented students who serve as peer mentors and tutors. These student employees have had similar experiences subsequently, they are able to relate and share information with the undocumented students who seek their assistance. Furthermore, research indicates that when sources of support are provided, as demonstrated by the center's offerings, undocumented students' academic achievement improves (Pérez et al., 2009).

Alleviating Fear

Fear is endemic in undocumented communities (Aguilar, 2018). The revelations shared by many of the participants aligned with this experience. In this section, I illustrate the most prevalent fears expressed by undocumented students including: 1) Disclosure of Immigration Identity; and 2) Fear of Deportation. Embedded in this section are the ways in which the USRC served to alleviate these fears. Several student participants in the study spoke about the fear their immigration status brings to their lives and the lives of their families. Arturo, who enrolled at Westside University as a first-year student indicated the

fear felt by undocumented students like himself, transcends to families and communities alike. Arturo explained:

There is a lot of fear in undocumented communities; we don't take a lot of risks because there's always that fear. If we mess up or if we approach something the wrong way, there can be consequences.

Arturo's comment is indicative of the restrictions associated with his undocumented status. He infers his status prevents him from taking chances, because if he does, and things do not play out as anticipated, the results affect not only him but also those around him. Sofia shared the fear that was instilled in her from family members who asked her to remain silent about her status. Sofia disclosed:

Not being able to speak about being undocumented and asking for help.

Like I was so scared. Because like as soon as I found out, they were like, don't tell nobody. They will take you. Always being scared of being pulled over, of driving, of so many things.

Sofia's revelation speaks to the stress, anxiety and fear ingrained in her by family members whose only goal is to protect them. These feelings are common among undocumented students and their community. As previously stated, in the following subsections, I present the two most prevalent fears shared by participants and the strategies adopted by the USRC to alleviate them.

Disclosing Undocumented Identity

Many of the student participants expressed their concerns and the stigma associated with revealing their immigration status. Norma, a recent graduate of Westside University, for example, commented on her peers' reluctance to disclose their status or the fear they felt about being associated with the center.

Norma reflected:

I know that sometimes it's hard to come out as an undocumented student.

I have known other students that feel afraid just to be near the center

because they don't want to be identified [as undocumented].

Norma's comment speaks to the hesitation undocumented students experience about making their identity known or their discomfort with being associated with the center.

It is important to note the USRC is in an area where other affinity centers are located. For some students as Norma mentioned, the location of the center may be too visible. Norma's comment is one that resonates with undocumented students and their community. Because of their immigration status, they are afraid (Pérez et al., 2010), feel marginalized, and have high levels of anxiety (Abrego, 2011). Lily also expressed the same sentiment as Norma and her own fear, "You know, some students are kind of just shy to even, going to the center. I was definitely afraid. But the center is there to support you." Although Lily shared her fear about going to the center, she was reassuring when she explained the center provides support for students. Lily found comfort and overcame her fear

through the support the USRC provided. For Jaime, his visit to the USRC and meeting with the staff provided him with the courage to disclose his status.

Jaime stated:

When I came in, first I was kinda afraid of this disclosure; my status. But when I discovered the center and the persons that worked there, it was a pleasure of letting them know who I was, what was my situation; because I felt like they genuinely wanted to help me.

Jaime overcame his fear and felt comfortable disclosing his status because the USRC demonstrated that they cared about him and he felt they were sincere.

Julia also recalled:

As a child, I was always told to keep it hush, my status. You were taught at a young age that if it [paperwork] asks about your status, you leave it blank. Because you don't want to check the wrong box. You don't want to lie to them.

In Julia's situation, she feels conflicted about her status when filling out forms because she has been taught to not disclose that she is undocumented. The comments expressed by Norma, Lily, Jaime, and Julia illustrate that the center and its staff made them feel comfortable about disclosing their status. In addition, they were reassuring to other students who may still have reservations about revealing their immigration status.

To ease away some of the fear expressed by students, the USRC provides programming that addresses this particular issue. The USRC has

collaborated with campus constituents and held events and services to support them. One of the programs hosted by the USRC was part of a series titled “Undocu Talks.” This was a session facilitated by the USRC staff. The announcement flier indicated the topic of discussion for this particular session was “Living UnDACAmended.” According to the USRC’s staff, this program was aimed at encouraging and supporting students who felt hopeless after DACA was rescinded. The message that was conveyed was that regardless of what happens with DACA, college is still attainable; that there are resources available to support undocumented students get into college and succeed. This session provided students with hope and opportunity despite the fear they felt about losing their DACA benefits. For some of these students, disclosing their non-DACA status meant they would face even more challenges because they would no longer be able to work or qualify for state financial aid.

The staff also shared details about another program offered by the center in partnership with the counseling department titled “Healing is Possible.” This campus wide event was launched shortly after the Trump administration took office and students asked for a safe space where they could meet, offer each other support, and talk about their fears and emotions. According to staff, students expressed great concern and experienced high levels of fear, anxiety, and distress. Through these “healing” sessions, students were able to express their feelings, find comfort in one another, and seek individual counseling if

desired. Alma, a staff member and ally, expressed her appreciation as she recalled:

It was refreshing to know that people even those I did not imagine would be supportive of undocumented students came to the center and offered words of affirmation to the students and hugs.

In addition, Alma indicated that faculty, staff, and administrators at Westside University demonstrated their support by stopping at the center with food, refreshments, and words of comfort. Alma's commentary speaks to the general support offered by the institution to undocumented students during difficult times. Gabriela, a paraprofessional, conveyed the USRC's efforts to encourage students to overcome the fear associated with their immigration status. Gabriela explained:

Since they opened the center, they have also been trying to encourage students that they should not be afraid of what they are or what their status is. I think that is the main concern here is that some students are actually just afraid of saying that they are undocumented.

Gabriela's remark speaks to the center's work in making students feel welcomed and comfortable about their undocumented identity. In addition to programs such as "Living UnDACAmented," the USRC along with the LGBTQ center on campus sponsored an event with an undocumented poet who shared his story and emphasized: "We've Never Needed Papers to Thrive." In a short video clip posted on the center's social media, the poet reflected on the day he obtained

DACA status. He commented on how the undocumented population is treated differently than U.S. citizens. His message was intended to be encouraging to students and provide them with hope for the future. The USRC's Facebook post announcing the poet's visit explained that he would share his story and explore the themes of migration and sexuality in his work. By collaborating with other affinity centers, the USRC provided students with opportunities to interact with other students. In addition, it acknowledged the intersection of multiple identities among the undocumented community.

During my observations, I also witnessed the support and comfort students offered each other at a "Writing Group" session. The writing sessions were facilitated by a faculty member and are a way for students to express their feelings, thoughts, and emotions through writing. As a couple of participants shared, this experience was a form of therapy for them. The students were invited to write for 5 minutes on anything that comes to mind or anything they are experiencing. Even if students could not think of anything to write, the instruction from the facilitator was "pen does not leave paper." This guideline is a writing practice and a way of warming up to overcome writer's block. After the five minutes of free writing, it was sharing time. Sharing time was voluntary and students could pass at any time. Some of the issues and concerns that arose included being away from family, relationships, and feelings of sadness and

fear.⁵ After most of the students shared their free writing, they were asked to write their answer to a simple question: What is going on? Now? Lately? Their answers ranged from comments on social justice, kids in detention camps, deportation centers, and the current political climate. There were a lot of emotions that surfaced as well as tears. Commentary included organizing and signing petitions to stop the mistreatment of undocumented families to giving each other advice and providing peer-to-peer support. During this observation, students demonstrated the care they have for one another. They felt comfortable with each other, laughed as a way to lighten the mood and showed empathy towards their peers. Their conversation and sharing exhibited resilience, mindfulness, and reflection. At the end, there was laughter, hugs, and food. The writing group appeared to alleviate some fears even if only for a few moments.

As mentioned earlier, establishing connections with staff is vital to ensuring undocumented students feel comfortable about disclosing their status and ultimately thriving in school. The concerns related to fear that the participants attributed to their immigration status was also communicated by allies and staff. Belen recalled, “Prior to having the center, many students were scared to even come talk to me as a resource and now that there is a center, they ask for help.” Similarly, Roberto expressed:

⁵ To honor the purpose of the writing group and its participants, specific comments have been omitted.

The center has done workshops and had speakers, and I think some of them are really vital such as providing assistance for students who have legal questions. Because I know from my personal experience, dealing with immigration law is both confusing and terrifying because people have fear of coming out. Some students, they have feelings of shame, of being an outsider, not wanting to speak up for fear of being labeled.

Some of the workshops referenced by Roberto included the USRC's collaboration with assembly members, community organizations, and educational partners. For example, the "DREAMers and Your Rights" panel discussion provided a conversation on immigration and its effects on undocumented youth as well as information on the rights of immigrants. The staff at the USRC shared information on another event they sponsored. The USRC partnered with another campus affinity group to host the film screening of "No Le Digas a Nadie" (Don't Tell Anyone). The film is a documentary of a young undocumented woman who comes out of the shadows to share her journey. She becomes an activist and her story reveals her experiences as an undocumented immigrant and the abuse she endured. These programs have diminished some of the fear undocumented students expressed in regards to disclosing their immigration status.

Fear of Deportation

The fear expressed by many of the participants went beyond disclosing their status. Participants discussed the fear of deportation, which in turn impacted their lives on multiple levels. As Aracely explained, her fear has limited

her ability to visit the center. Aracely recalled: "I try to go to the center as much as I can but I commute on the bus. I'm scared to drive. So, I ride the bus everywhere". She continued, "but I feel like, well, if they stop me, I'm going to be like, Oh, I have a permit to be here."

Aracely revealed she is a DACA recipient. As such, she is protected from deportation, able to obtain a driver's license, and eligible for a work permit. However, she is still fearful of driving and taking full advantage of her DACA benefits. She recognized that while she has certain protections, the possibility of being pulled over can negatively affect her and may result in deportation nonetheless. Like Aracely, Jaime shared a similar fact when he stated:

I experienced a lot of fear. Your family will give you this fear of at any given moment at any given time, something can happen to them or to you because you're undocumented. So we live in fear.

In Jaime's experience, the fear he referred to was related to the risk of detention and deportation of family members (Androff et al., 2011) and him. The comments shared by these students represent the challenges they experience from a young age because of their undocumented status.

Javier, a staff member and ally, explained that due to the current political climate, students have expressed the need for additional support specifically regarding what to do if they are stopped by immigration officials or if Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) knocks on their doors. Javier indicated:

Right now with the political climate going on, students are always asking to see more workshops on immigration rights because they want to know their rights.

Accordingly, to alleviate these fears and challenges, the USRC in collaboration with the campus' counseling center, conducted mental health workshops, which provided students with the opportunity to share and express their emotions in a confidential and safe space. They also provided counseling sessions for students who feel more comfortable meeting with counselors individually. The USRC has also partnered with immigration attorneys to provide legal services to students on a weekly basis. In addition, as part of their newly developed parent engagement component, the USRC hosted a "Know Your Rights" workshop aimed at informing families on what to do if they or anyone they know are questioned about their immigration status. Some of the handouts distributed at this program included the "Red Card" and a one-page flier with tips on what to do in the event of a raid.

Fostering Acompañamiento

Acompañamiento is "the embodiment of mentorship, academic redemption, and community engagement" (Aguilar, 2018, p. 153).

Acompañamiento means "to create knowledge that is accessible and relatable for our communities by exposing it in such a way that matches their experiences" (Aguilar, 2018, p. 157). To ensure students and families feel welcomed into the institution from the beginning, the USRC provides intentional programming

throughout the year. Some of the opportunities presented by the USRC included: the Undocumented Students and Families Welcome and Orientation program, a parent engagement institute aimed at connecting parents and families and providing them with resources to help their students, informational workshops and the Undocumented Student Recognition Ceremony. Additionally, the USRC helped students develop a sense of belonging and fostered acompañamiento by way of peer support and institutional agents. In the section below, I elaborate on the ways in which the USRC fostered acompañamiento among students and their families.

The Undocumented Students and Families Welcome and Orientation program is an event hosted by the USRC because they understand the importance of family support and involvement. The program invites newly enrolled students and their families to learn about the services the USRC provides, meet with campus representatives about the resources they offer, and an opportunity to meet and hear from current students. I attended this event and it was evident that parents and family members were invested and supportive of their children as they began their college journey at Westside University. There were approximately 100 parents and family members in attendance and the program was conducted in both English and Spanish. I witnessed the care and interest the family members demonstrated by the questions they asked, such as how safe are their students on campus? And can immigration officers come to the university? The USRC team addressed the parents' concerns with a sense

of compassion and understanding. They expressed the campus is very supportive of undocumented students and the likelihood of this happening is minimal. They were attentive to the speakers and the information they were presenting on financial aid, housing, support programs, counseling services, and careers. They asked questions about what they should expect during this year of transition. Most importantly, they wanted to know how they could support their students and what type of services were available to help them succeed. One of the highlights of the program was the student panel, which consisted of current undocumented students who shared their stories. They talked about their majors, where to go for help, the importance of networking and building relationships. The program culminated with a question and answer session. Families raised questions regarding scholarships and financial opportunities for their students, inquired about school policies and campus safety. The USRC staff and student panelists responded candidly and thoughtfully. One student spoke about the importance of education and obtaining a degree. She also mentioned that when selecting a major, students should “chose happiness” instead of “acceptable majors” such engineering or medicine. She spoke about her decision to change her major to art and graphic design because that is what brings her joy. Based on their own experiences, the student panelists provided parents and families with the reassurance that the center’s staff and the university community are committed to supporting their students. Overall, the

families seemed happy with the program and the information they received which will assist them to help their students succeed.

The parent engagement institute is composed of a series of information sessions hosted by the USRC where parents demonstrate their interest and support of their students and it is another way in which the USRC recognizes the importance of including families. I had the opportunity to attend and observe a workshop on scholarships. At the start of the session, the presenter asked the attendees what language they prefer she present the information and they responded Spanish was their preference. The speaker conducted the session in Spanish and provided very thorough and detailed information on scholarship opportunities for their students. The presentation included step-by-step guidance on the different types of scholarships available and related deadlines, they provided information on more general type of scholarships to the university's specific scholarship process. Given the limited funding opportunities available for undocumented students, the presenter provided parents with a handout on scholarships that students could apply for without regard to immigration status, as it is not part of the eligibility criteria. With the information on scholarships that is now available at the center and through these types of workshops, undocumented students have more opportunities to continue their education.

The programming offered by the USRC not only assists students and their families but also their surrounding communities. Participants are encouraged to share their knowledge with others who may benefit from the information they

have received. Another example of the center's programming which included families was the "We Are D.A.C.A" event they hosted with other post-secondary institutions shortly after DACA was rescinded. The purpose of the event was to support the undocumented community by having a panel of DACA students share their stories of challenges and success as they find their way in our communities. Also as noted previously, the center provides assistance with DACA application renewals and connects students with agencies that assist with DACA application related costs.

A signature event hosted by the USRC and the undocumented students club, which represents the embodiment of *acompañamiento*, is the Undocumented Student Recognition Ceremony. This is a program honoring graduating students. To promote the event, the center posted daily announcements with a countdown to the program. Every day, the post reflected a different picture of previous ceremonies showing students wearing their cap and gown, family members hugging their graduates, and students smiling and others teary-eyed. This event is the culmination of the students' college experience. However, it is also more than that. It is a reflection of their persistence, resilience, and pride. It is a representation of the *acompañamiento* from their families, their peers, and the community.

Creating a Sense of Belonging by Way of Peers and Institutional Agents

Peer Support

Peer groups can help undocumented students gain access to information and provide emotional support as they navigate their enrollment. (Hallett, 2013; Pérez et al., 2009). Engaging with peers and developing a network helps students feel welcomed and overcome challenges related to inclusion and feeling safe (Canedo Sanchez & So, 2015; Hallett, 2013). Participants in the study recalled the positive interactions they experienced with their peers at the USRC, which in turn helped foster acompañamiento. Julia, a recent graduate explained:

With the students, we find ... we comfort each other a lot because it is a very unique thing we're all going through. It doesn't matter how we explain it to people. They're not going to understand. You have to be undocumented to know the struggles behind it.

For Julia, only other individuals, who identify as undocumented, understand the struggles of other undocumented people. She insists that in order to fully understand what undocumented students experience, you also have to be undocumented. Julia's statement aligns with the literature in that undocumented students rely on each other for support because they have similar experiences. Jaime also spoke about being able to identify with other undocumented students due to the commonality of their struggles and being able to build a sense of community among each other. Jaime stated:

It's not just what the center has given us but what we can give each other.

I could choose to be with people that can relate to me and can understand

me; my struggles and my problems because most of us have struggled the same way, so we were able to identify with each other and build a community, build some sort of a family that could benefit everybody that comes into the center.

By interacting with other students like him, Jaime feels understood and supported. He is able to relate to his peers and develop a sense of family and community. When describing the peer support she has encountered, Rebeca expressed, "it is just so great how we can all relate to each other, support one another, inspire one another." Rebeca's comment speaks to the importance of developing and cultivating relationships among peers. Daniela also described her experience with her peers when she explained:

We share information and experience. It's like a family in a sense. If a student is taking a class that I took two years ago or a year ago, then I will share my experience, "Oh, you should be careful, don't overload," or we kind of tend to look for each other, help for each other. Or even if we know somebody is hiring, "Hey, they're hiring," they'll let us know first". And then before posting them [the jobs] online or anything, they'll say, "Hey, do you need a job?" It's kind of sharing information first.

By connecting with each other primarily through the USRC, students are able to help one another make informed decisions. Furthermore, students are able to use their own knowledge and experiences to assist others navigate school. Daniela's testimonial reveals the positive and multi-faceted impact a peer

network can have on their academic endeavors. The support and advice provided by peers serves as a supplement to what the campus and the USRC offers them.

Student participants also used their peer network to encourage each other when they feel overwhelmed or discouraged. When pursuing any goal whether it is academic or professional, Rebeca encourages her undocumented peers with the following message: “Don’t give up, if you want to be somebody and no matter what anybody says, don’t give up. For me, I am going to get there undocumented or documented.” By connecting with other peers, Rebeca feels empowered and wants others to feel the same way. Alma also shared the sentiments expressed by students regarding peer support: “Our undocumented students support one another and they’re always sharing resources.”

Alma’s comment confirms the experiences expressed by Julia, Daniela, and Rebeca. Undocumented students and their peers provide each other support, encouragement, and knowledge to help them navigate their college trajectory. I had the opportunity to witness some of these interactions. During one of my visits to the USRC, I observed the camaraderie among the students that were there. Some were at a table talking and sharing a meal while others were at computer stations doing research for a class or getting help with a homework assignment. It was evident they felt comfortable with each other and had developed a sense of family and community as the students that were interviewed conveyed.

In addition to relying on family support and the encouragement of their peer networks, undocumented students often need the assistance of institutional agents to navigate the complexity of educational processes (Hallett, 2013) including applying for admission, submitting financial aid applications, and learning about support services. Without the influence and knowledge institutional agents possess, the college journey of undocumented students would be more difficult to navigate.

Institutional Agents

Although some participants pointed to negative experiences with faculty and staff, they also encountered and developed supportive relationships with institutional agents. Institutional agents are defined as individuals “who are well positioned to provide key forms of social and institutional support” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1066). These institutional agents such as admission officers, advisors, and faculty (Gildersleeve & Hernandez, 2012) play the role of mentors and advocates who provide information and support (Hallett, 2013) through the relationships they build with students. Norma, a recent graduate explained:

I feel like most of the staff and faculty are supportive of the undocumented community. I was able to graduate in four years. I got the support of my advisors and I was able to make new friends.

Norma relied on her connections with institutional agents such as staff and faculty to successfully graduate with her bachelor’s degree in a timely fashion. She also built relationships with peers along the way. Victoria, a graduate

student, encountered difficulties with her financial aid. Through the efforts of institutional agents who possessed the knowledge and connections with other staff, her issue was resolved. Victoria recalled:

This last quarter, they were charging me some type of fee from the previous year. I went to talk to them and they said, well, that's how it is. I asked what if I didn't have that money? They said, "then you will be dropped from your classes".

Victoria expressed she was frustrated but relied on staff members whom she knew had close ties to the financial aid office and they were able to help her. These institutional agents used their own capital to support Victoria and get the issue resolved. At the end Victoria explained, "They had made a mistake." Victoria was fortunate to have individuals that advocated for her. Her example also illustrates that the outcome could have been different because not all students have close relationships with empowering institutional agents (Hallett, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Institutional agents not only assist students with the complexities of a college environment but also with the challenges students face outside the classroom. Sofia for example, shared that she was stressed because she had not heard about the status of her DACA application. When she confided this information to her counselor, she was referred to the USRC for assistance. Sofia explained:

That was like my first experience with the center. I swear like it changed my life completely. They were like, you got to contact the congressman. How long has it been? I'm like, it's been like a year now. And like I haven't received anything. They got me in contact with the congressional representative. Literally the moment that I called, I called like at 9:00 a.m. in the morning by 12, my DACA had been approved.

By relying on her relationship with her counselor, Sofia was able to resolve her concern expeditiously and learned about the staff at the USRC who also served as institutional agents on her behalf. Additionally, institutional agents at Westside University spoke about their motivation for helping students adjust to a new environment and providing support. Belen, an ally, explained:

We have a close-knit relationship with the staff at the center and as allies, we volunteer to provide counseling to the students. We all know each other very well and we don't mind staying after hours or coming in earlier or not taking a lunch to talk to a family or a student. We really do try to walk these students and families to the point that they feel like they can do it on their own.

Belen serves as an institutional agent who sees her role as a means to empower undocumented students and their families. In her role as an institutional agent, Rocio, also an ally, spoke about the importance of staying abreast of policies that can affect undocumented students. Rocio stated, "I try to stay up to date with legislature that affects not only the admissions portion but

any piece of legislature that might affect the student experience." In her comment, Rocio reflected on the importance of staying informed regarding immigration legislation because it is constantly changing. The testimonials Belen and Rocio shared align with the literature on the vital roles institutional agents play in assisting undocumented students during their school trajectory. Institutional agents' acompañamiento is demonstrated in the knowledge they create and the way they make it "accessible and relatable" (Aguilar, 2018, p. 157) for students and communities.

Nurturing a Sense of Belonging

When describing the USRC, undoubtedly, participants inclusive of students, staff and allies shared that the center provided a "safe space", "home", "paradise." There were similarities in the participants' comments about the USRC as they shared the center was a place where they felt a sense of belonging. The most common theme expressed by the participants in their responses regarding their description of the USRC was "safe haven" "home", and "like a family". Jaime expressed that at the center, he felt he could be himself and not keep his status a secret. Jaime described the center as "paradise." He stated:

Paradise. It's a really good place for me to be myself. I don't have to hide who I am. I don't have to hide my status. They make you feel at home. Make you feel that you belong.

Jaime associated his connection to the USRC as having the ability to be himself. He sees the center as a place where there is no pretense. He felt a sense of belonging. Similarly, Martha conveyed the center has been a second home to her. She mentioned she would have been disoriented if the USRC had not provided her with a family-like setting. Martha recalled: "It's a family environment. It's like a second home to me. I mean, without them I think I would've been lost." Martha's reference is an indication of the work of the USRC to make students feel at ease and confident rather than apprehensive and lost. Sofia expressed a similar experience when she commented:

It [the center] changed my life completely. It is very friendly, like welcoming, happy. I like being in there. If I wouldn't have walked into the center, I probably would have dropped out by now".

Similar to Martha's experience, Sofia confirmed that the USRC is a welcoming and friendly space. She also reiterated that without the center, leaving school would have been a possibility. For Victoria, the USRC not only gave her confidence but also provided her with a safe space and a home-like environment. Victoria explained:

More than the center empowering me, helping me, or being just a safe space, the center is like home. That's how I would describe it, home".

The student participants were effusive in their remarks, praised the USRC for its work in making them feel welcomed, safe, and supported. Building on the concept of *acompañamiento*, the USRC is a source of support and community to

undocumented students. In the same fashion, allies and staff viewed the center as a vital component of the campus and surrounding community. They offered their insights based on their interactions with undocumented students and their visits to the USRC. Alma, a staff and ally, shared the following comment:

A lot of people say that it's a safe space, but I think that it's more than that.

It's like a home. It's like a home away from home for students.

Alma's reflection coincides with the comments the students made when speaking about the USRC. She also sees the center as being more than a space where students congregate, a space where they are free of criticism or bias. Alma confirmed that the center is a home for students. Rocio, also a staff and ally, explained:

I think it's essential for the center to be a part of the campus. It provides holistic opportunities and resources. It's not just a one-time resource for students, it's a continuous resource. It's a community resource. Often times, students go [to the center] because their parents are in that situation. It doesn't necessarily have to be for themselves, but for their loved ones.

For Rocio, in addition to the center being a place where students find resources, it is a community space where families can also get assistance. Alejandra described the USRC as a vital space because it creates a place where people matter. Alejandra explained:

I think it's a really important place for them to find resources, information, but also create a sense of community and sense of belonging. People have made it a home.

Alejandra highlighted how the center not only provides resources and information but it also creates a place that builds a sense of belonging for students and the community. Miguel also agreed with the commentary of students, staff and allies when describing the USRC. Miguel offered the following comment:

I see it as a good support mechanism. A safe place to have conversations, to exchange ideas, learn from each other.

Similar to Alma, Rocio and Alejandra, Miguel's comment affirms the USRC is a place where students feel welcomed, safe and at home.

The testimonials by the majority of participants coincide with the literature related to Undocumented Student Resource Centers and the instrumental role they play in supporting first-year, transfer, and graduate undocumented students in higher education (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018). USRCs provide a welcoming, safe, and supportive space intended to improve students' college experience. The center at Westside University fosters *acompañamiento* through the services it delivers and its focus on providing undocumented students with a place where they can come together, dialogue and express their concerns, and show support for each other. Furthermore, given the existing anti-immigrant climate, the USRC also made concerted efforts to promote agency and advocacy for students and their families.

Promoting Agency and Advocacy

Because of changes to immigration legislation and prevalent prejudiced attitudes by many, undocumented students find themselves in a state of uncertainty. As mentioned previously, students expressed fear due to their immigration status, anxiety related to financial limitations, and discouraged because of the lack of understanding from faculty and staff. The efforts related to promoting agency and advocacy by the USRC is reflected in the USRC's mission statement which states: "The [said center] at [said university] empowers prospective and current students as well as their families to navigate the college process and realize their academic aspirations by providing a safe space, mentorship and support through educational workshops, engagement opportunities and community service." It is also reflected on the work they do both at the institution and in the community. Through their efforts, the USRC has empowered undocumented students and their families to be their own advocates. Students, staff and allies spoke about the importance of advocacy.

Advocacy and Empowerment

Through their advocacy and agency actions, undocumented students make their voices heard and their presence felt (Galindo, 2012). The USRC has promoted students' sense of agency by providing opportunities for them to get involved. For example, the center has hosted marches to demonstrate solidarity during turbulent times, presented workshops on how to respond if Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) knocks on their door, and partnered with

immigration attorneys to serve the undocumented student population at WU. Two of the programs offered by the USRC were the “Undocu Talks” series which included topics such as “Living UnDACAmented” and “Talk with our Legal Team”, the organization that provides legal services to undocumented students. These programs were aimed at empowering students and alleviating their fears.

Victoria reflected on the “Undocu Talks” sessions she attended. Victoria shared:

The one that I liked the most was the [said session], which is pretty much Undocu Talks. We would talk about topics that were very relevant to the undocumented population and our existence. They provided snacks and beverages like coffee and tea and other stuff like the name says. We would talk about things like life without DACA or what happens after graduation or about undocumented mental health and also about relationships while undocumented. Victoria’s reflection highlights the center’s support and sensitivity to the needs of undocumented students. The sessions helped students to not feel alone and instead provided them with hope for the future.

Victoria expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to dialogue about issues that affect the undocumented community. Some of the topics covered resonated with Victoria as she explained:

These are topics that are relevant to us. For example, dating while undocumented. When you date someone in most relationships, you are not afraid to be who you are. You're not hiding certain parts of your life.

When you're undocumented, a lot of things happen like this, "How can I tell my significant other? I'm falling in love with this person. How can I tell him I'm not with you for the papers, or I love you, but what if..." I reveal this aspect of my life if I didn't do it at the very beginning. What if that person leaves me because I came out, because I told them this part of my life, and then they're thinking that I'm, I guess, deceiving them? In a way.

It was apparent Victoria struggled with this dilemma that some undocumented students experience. They have a difficult time sharing their identity with someone they are trying to build a relationship. By providing students with the opportunity to come together, they feel comfortable having discussions on sensitive topics. The USRC empowers them and encourages them to feel confident. Jaime recognized that people may not agree with his status but is not apologetic when he recalled:

We're here because we were brought here. I'm not asking for sympathy, but at least understanding. We're here because we want to better ourselves and the majority of our time is being here, so we feel like an American. Even though we are not considered Americans, we feel like them. I believe the more that we try to advocate for ourselves, the more that they get to know us, and would like to know who we are and what we're about. Acknowledging us, it's a big help for them to know that we are here, that we're going to be here, and then we're going to try our best to succeed.

Jaime's comment reflects his desire to be understood and acknowledged. He expresses the conundrum undocumented immigrants find themselves in and their resolve to be successful. Sofia has also learned that it is important to express your needs in order to survive as she explained, "You have to ask for what you need or else you're not going to make it". Sofia described the importance of self-advocacy and advised that if one does not ask for help, one may not succeed. Similarly, Rebeca commented:

I have learned over time that if I need something, I have to reach out. It's something you have to come into terms with being undocumented and I'm learning that myself. I've never felt ashamed of being undocumented.

Rebeca's comment illustrates that she has come to terms with her status and encourages other students to do the same. Most importantly, she does not think of herself as being less than others because of her immigration status.

The sentiments expressed by Jaime, Sofia and Rebeca highlight the sense of empowerment and self-advocacy many undocumented students lean on to challenge exclusion and inequities. Additionally, staff and allies also highlighted the USRC's advocacy efforts. Alma explained:

We have discussions with political representatives to see what law needs to pass in order for more funding to be allocated to undocumented resource centers.

Alma expressed that the center's advocacy efforts go beyond the work they do for students. In order for bigger change to happen, she understands the

importance of networking with individuals in the political arena. By actively working with political representatives that serve as conduits to advocate for more resources, the USRC engages both campus and surrounding community to support and understand the unique needs of the undocumented student population. Javier, a staff member and ally commented on the work the USRC conducts to empower students as he mentioned, “We advocate for students by creating workshops and events for both parents and students. We need to advocate for those students that do not have DACA”. As previously mentioned, part of my document analysis included reviewing social media posts and fliers or announcements. In collaboration with political representatives, the USRC hosted the “Know Your Rights” program and supported a student to represent the undocumented community in Washington, D.C. to advocate for the Clean Dream Act, legislation that would create a pathway to U.S. citizenship for DREAMers or DACAmented individuals.

Javier illustrated the USRC’s advocacy efforts via its programming, which is inclusive of families and of non-DACA recipients. In addition to workshops, these efforts include information sessions on community service and collaborations with non-profit organizations aimed at helping the immigrant community. Through document analysis, I learned about the programs Javier mentioned. These programs included an annual campus-wide program where students packaged food for families in underserved communities and a donation drive to provide clothes and hygiene items to families at the border. Because of

the USRC's efforts regarding advocacy and agency, some students expressed their commitment to help others. It was important for them to demonstrate that they cared and wanted to give back.

Giving Back

The affinity student participants felt towards the USRC and the relationships they developed with their peers, increased their confidence and commitment to give back to other students and their community. These students developed their own sense of agency and wanted to promote the same for their peers. In their testimonials, several students mentioned how they did not want other undocumented students to be misinformed or feel discouraged. They also expressed their sense of commitment to supporting and assisting their peers. Sofia for example, spoke about her desire to provide support to other undocumented students as she explained:

I want to help other people. And other people are experiencing the same situation. I got to help, I got to do something because I don't want anyone to feel the way I did.

Sofia felt a sense of commitment to assisting other people who may be experiencing the same challenges she faced. Likewise, Julia, a student and recent graduate identified as an ally when she explained, "I am an advocate for the community for those who are afraid to come out of the shadows." Julia feels empowered and wants her community to feel the same way. In addition, as a former student assistant at the USRC, Norma mentioned how rewarding her work

experience was as she shared, “By working there it felt good to kind of give back to the students.” Specifically, she mentioned the scholarship guide calendar she helped put together to provide students with information on scholarship opportunities. Martha also commented on her commitment to serve students when she mentioned:

As a graduate student, I like it. I like how I'm able to mentor the ones that are coming behind me. Now I know how to guide them or how to help them out.

The narrative of these participants reflects the loyalty and sense of responsibility they have for their undocumented peers and their community. It is a way for them to work toward a common goal, practice collectivity, and empower themselves and others (DeAngelo, Schuster, & Stebleton, 2016). These students felt empowered and encouraged by the interactions they had with the USRC, and the knowledge they gained through the programs they attended.

Advancing Post-baccalaureate Education and Career Choice

In addition to helping and supporting their peers, some undocumented students in the study talked about their aspirations to further their education beyond the bachelor's degree and their career choices. However, in some instances, the interactions with staff and faculty at WU were difficult, disappointing, and discouraging. Martha, a graduate student, shared her experience when she sought assistance about applying to graduate school. Martha stated:

At first, I was really disappointed when I wanted to get my master's, because I wasn't sure if it was the same process of applying as undocumented or not undocumented. So when I went and I asked if it was the same process for DREAMers to apply, I still remember that the person that was at the front desk, laughed and was like, "What do you mean DREAMers? Don't we all dream?" She made a joke out of it, which it wasn't funny. Martha's experience illustrates the lack of compassion towards and limited knowledge of the undocumented student population. Martha was offended but used this opportunity as a teaching moment and made the staff member aware of the center and the students it serves.

In this case, Martha mentioned to the staff member that the university had established a center to assist the undocumented student population on campus. The employee apologized and after talking with their supervisor they indicated that the application process for the graduate program for undocumented students was the same as for U.S. citizens and residents. Martha also noted she was glad when she ran across this employee at an event hosted by the USRC. She felt the employee was at least trying to learn more about the undocumented students who attend Westside University.

Julia's experience with a faculty member, whom she considered a mentor, had a different outcome and was severed once she found out that Julia was undocumented. Julia recalled:

I got really close to a professor here, who was a person who made me change my major. We would email each other back and forth. Then once she figured out about my status here in this country, she cut all communication with me. We had a really nice relationship. She offered to write me letters for graduate school, but the moment that she figured that out, [my undocumented status] she took it all back. So just because of my status here in this country, my relationship with that professor ended who I really looked up to. Julia was hurt by the behavior of the faculty member whom she trusted and confided. She had relied on this individual to support her graduate school aspirations and because of her immigration status, the faculty member rejected her.

For Julia, this experience was disappointing and disheartening. I observed that recounting the story brought her pain. She lowered her head and her voice trembled as she spoke. Because of the discouraging stories revealed by students like Martha and Julia, the USRC is aware of the need to educate the campus community. As an ally, Javier shared, “the staff and faculty on campus, I think a lot of them are still unaware of how to help undocumented students.” In attempts to remedy the lack of guidance and awareness by staff and faculty, the USRC offers undocumented trainings. These trainings have been conducted in the classroom, at faculty meetings and at school sites. The intent of the undocumented trainings are wide in scope. The main focus is to educate individuals about the challenges undocumented students face and to create a sense of understanding

of this student population. By doing so, undocumented students can be supported in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree and beyond.

Fortunately, students are not discouraged easily and are resilient. In addition to expanding access and providing support to undocumented students, as undergraduates (first-year and transfers), the USRC also encouraged and supported their decisions to pursue their post-baccalaureate aspirations. Participants in this study shared their experiences with the USRC as they related to their post-baccalaureate plans. Martha recalled,

The center helped me apply to graduate school and supported me when I visited one of the graduate programs on campus, which was not very friendly or knowledgeable about the application process for undocumented students. There was the Grad School Conference that the resource center had about, how can you navigate graduate school or if you want to get your Ph.D. I am now halfway through my master's program and considering pursuing a Ph.D.

After attending the Graduate School Conference, Martha felt encouraged about pursuing a graduate degree and was inspired to consider a terminal degree program. Similarly, Julia, a recent Westside University graduate currently pursuing a master's program, also attested to the assistance she received from the USRC as she explored pursuing a post-baccalaureate degree.

So, the Undocumented Student Center taught me that, yes, I might be undocumented, but it doesn't ... it won't stop me. I can go further on and

even seek my Ph.D. They did research with me, helped me find resources for financial aid to attend graduate school although I was not looking into our institution. They assisted me and helped me network. The staff at the center informed me about a tuition discount opportunity and thanks to their assistance; I applied and received the scholarship. For Julia, the USRC helped her overcome her doubts about pursuing a master's degree because of her undocumented status.

Julia was also motivated and encouraged to continue her education beyond the baccalaureate level and expressed how their assistance helped her secure funding for her master's degree. For Rebeca, her experience with the USRC confirmed her desire to pursue graduate school once she obtains her bachelor's degree.

Although I already knew I was going to pursue a master's degree, the center has motivated me a lot more. The staff have been extremely supportive and have given me tips on what graduate school is like and how to succeed. This fall I will begin the process to apply for grad school.

Rebeca is enthusiastic about the possibilities of pursuing a master's degree. She praises the USRC for their encouragement, motivation, and assistance as she reflects on her post-baccalaureate plans. Similarly, for Sofia, the interaction with the staff at the USRC had a positive influence on her as she contemplated graduate school.

The center has motivated me to go to grad school. I did not think it was possible for me but they showed me otherwise. Through the center, I have been exposed to real life stories of undocumented graduate students when I attended the Graduate School Conference. They have also made me aware of funding to attend graduate school.

Sofia expressed how the center gave her the confidence to pursue a graduate degree. She also saw herself in the stories of other undocumented graduate students. Most importantly, she is now aware of financial resources that can help her pay for graduate school.

Through document analysis, I found that the USRC's promotional event flier about the Grad School Conference and its social media posts support the stories shared by these participants. Alma also offered her thoughts on this event. Alma stated:

This event was established on campus after several students, staff, and allies attended a similar conference at another campus. This particular conference offered opportunities specific to students in northern California and the USRC wanted to extend this opportunity to students in this region. At this conference, students attend workshops on the application process, how to pay for graduate school, finding jobs without DACA status, and networking opportunities.

In addition to providing informational workshops, hearing keynote addresses by other undocumented graduate students, the USRC provided participants with a

level of confidence and determination to pursue a graduate degree. The USRC also assisted students with career decisions and employment opportunities.

Career Options and Job Opportunities

Undocumented students also struggle when seeking assistance and direction as they explore career choices and employment connections. That being said, participants attested to the ways in which the USRC helped them explore career options and assisted them to seek employment opportunities. Norma for example, recalled her experience with the team at the USRC as she approached graduation:

Here at the center, they helped me so much with my resume and my cover letter and looking for jobs. They talk about life after graduation. I think like the center understands more about what we qualify and what we don't qualify like we don't qualify to work for federal agencies but other people don't know that.

Norma was able to secure her first professional job shortly after graduating college because of the guidance and support she received from the USRC.

"They told me about the job and I applied. Now, I am now considering going to graduate school." In similar fashion, Sofia referenced how the USRC provided her with opportunities to attend conferences that assisted her in solidifying her career plans and continue her education beyond the baccalaureate level. Sofia recalled:

I attended the “Keeping the Dream Alive” Conference in Sacramento with the center and we talked about my plans of becoming a teacher. Those are plans I had since I was seven. They encouraged me not to give up on my goals. I’m always afraid of not working after I get my bachelor’s degree but seeing all the different students that have accomplished their goals, it gives me hope. Learning about the different resources and opportunities at these conferences have inspired me to keep on going. In the sense of my goals and grad school. They helped me find the credential program office and also resources for the [said career related exam].

Through the resources and services provided by the USRC both Norma and Sofia as well as other students were exposed to opportunities after obtaining their bachelor’s degrees. For Norma, obtaining employment became a reality and Sofia is determined to continue on to a credential program to become a math teacher. Miguel shared it is important that undocumented students be supported and that people need to be aware of their needs. Miguel expressed:

Knowing what the [undocumented students’] needs are is important and then by actions. Putting money for undergraduate research when it is needed or a career opportunity for them that could be made available.

For Miguel, providing critical information to students and making them aware of where to get assistance and support is important. The USRC collaborated with Career Services and hosted a resume and internship search session specific to

undocumented students with the goal of assisting them with their resumes to enter the job market. I gathered this information when I reviewed a flier I collected for my document analysis. In addition to general information such as the date, location and time for the session, the flier explained that at the workshop students would learn “how to showcase their work and volunteer experiences on their resume and develop the skills needed to obtain an internship.” The flier was also publicized on the USRC’s social media platforms thus ensuring this information was shared widely.

Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I presented the findings of this study and discussed the themes that I constructed from the data. The intent of the study was to understand the role of an Undocumented Student Resource Center as undocumented students navigate their college journey. From the data, I constructed six themes including: 1) Facilitating College Access; 2) Breaking Down Barriers; 3) Alleviating Fear; 4) Fostering Acompañamiento; 5) Promoting Agency and Advocacy; and 6) Advancing Post-Baccalaureate Education and Career Choice. The data gathered thorough semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis, provided a deep understanding of the USRC at Westside University and the ways it influences the student experience and persistence.

The participants in the study demonstrated a strong affinity to the USRC. Their narratives illustrated the ways in which the center helped them to make

informed decisions regarding college from the point of entry to graduation and beyond. They referenced the array of services they sought from the USRC and the sense of community having a center provided them.

The participants were candid, honest, and resilient when they shared their stories, both good and bad. They pointed to the importance of building relationships and the support they have received from the center, allies, and peers alike. Despite some of the negative experiences they encountered inside and outside of the classroom, the participants exhibited a high level of resolve to continue their education and not give up. They were able to use the knowledge they obtained through their interactions at the center to help their peers, develop social networks, and become their own advocates.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to explore the role the Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC) plays in the college journey of undocumented students at Westside University (WU). I used an intrinsic case study approach because I was intrinsically interested in the USRC at WU in particular (Stake, 1995, 2000). Using UndocuCrit (Aguilar, 2018) as my conceptual framework, as well as the existing literature on USRCs (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018), I explored how the center at WU influenced the experiences and persistence of undocumented students, if at all. In addition, I was interested in the specific strategies the USRC used to support undocumented students.

The three research questions that guided this study were: 1) How does an USRC at a four-year, public, comprehensive university influence the experiences of undocumented students, if at all?; 2) What strategies does an USRC implement to support undocumented students, if any?; 3) How does an USRC influence the persistence of undocumented students' if at all? By critically analyzing the role of the USRC through the experiences of undocumented students and insights from staff and allies, this study supports existing literature in that USCRs are critically important in the college experiences of undocumented students (Canedo Sanchez & So 2015; Enriquez et al., 2019). The positive impact that an USRC has on undocumented students and their

families is significant and its services vital so that students can make informed decisions and develop a sense of belonging within the institution and in their communities. Through the experiences narrated by all the student participants in this study, the USRC at Westside University provided them with a home away from home, knowledge and information to ease their transition to a four-year university. The USRC also empowered them to develop community and fellowship and gave them the confidence to pursue or desire to pursue a degree beyond the baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate levels.

Based on the array of services including CA DREAM Act application workshops, scholarship information, families welcome and orientation day, ally trainings and mental health sessions, the USRC demonstrated their commitment beyond facilitating college access. All programming provided by the USRC was aimed at informing faculty, staff and students at WU about its resources and bringing them up to date on immigration policy and legislation. The sessions hosted for parents and families, provided them with important information to help their children/students succeed. The USRC fostered a sense of belonging among students and provided them with a welcoming environment. However, as indicated by some of the negative experiences expressed by some participants, more work needs to be done to ensure WU becomes an undocumented-friendly campus (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the results of the study. Second, I discuss how these results align with the existing literature presented in chapter

two. Third, I advance recommendations for institutions and educational leaders to support undocumented student success. Fourth, I provide suggestions for future research and lastly, I provide the final conclusion of the study.

Overview of Findings

I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with twenty-four participants including, 14 self-identified undocumented students, three staff, and seven allies. Twenty-one interviews were conducted face-to-face and four student interviews were conducted by phone. Six of the student participants entered the university as first-year students (immediately after high school graduation) and eight enrolled as transfer students. Of the 14 student participants, 12 were female and two were male; nine were undergraduates; three were recent graduates; and two were enrolled in graduate degree programs with aspirations of pursuing doctoral degrees. Allies and staff were faculty, staff, and administrators at Westside University. Some have worked at the center and others have demonstrated support for the undocumented student population by participating in event planning, contributing financially at fundraising events, and attending the USRC's sponsored programs including the annual race, art auction, and undocumented student graduation ceremony. I also examined organizational documents and conducted observations at various USRC sponsored events. These sources provided me with a deep understanding of the role of the USRC at Westside University.

Based on my analysis of the data, I constructed six overarching and interrelated themes. These themes represent the role of the USRC in the undocumented students' college journey. The six themes I identified were: 1) Facilitating College Access; 2) Breaking Down Barriers; 3) Alleviating Fear; 4) Fostering Acompañamiento; 5) Promoting Agency and Advocacy; and 6) Advancing Post-Baccalaureate Education and Career Choice. I also presented several sub-themes where appropriate. The major findings of the study are presented below.

Facilitating College Access

The undocumented students in the study revealed that the USRC facilitated college access and ultimately their enrollment into Westside University. The center's intentional outreach and recruitment efforts provided students with information on the resources and support available to them so they could make informed decisions regarding their college options. By visiting high schools and community colleges, making classroom presentations, attending college fairs, and parent nights, the USRC established and developed strong relationships with students, their families, and K-14 school personnel. The staff and allies were proactive, caring, and validating in their approach to attract undocumented students to WU. They shared and demonstrated their willingness to visit high schools and community colleges in the surrounding area, provided information on the services the center has to offer, and connected students and their families with referrals to community resources if needed.

Breaking Down Barriers

Participants in the study also conveyed the ways the USRC assisted them to overcome some of the financial and educational challenges they faced inside and outside of the classroom and during the course of their college career. While some of the negative interactions students encountered, such as discrimination and prejudice, could have deterred them from pursuing their academic goals, and even stop out, students relied on the USRC, their peers, and institutional agents for support.

When facing financial challenges, the participants in the study relayed that the USRC intervened on their behalf with financial aid staff to resolve their problems and helped them navigate the DREAM Act grant and loan application processes. The USRC also helped students identify scholarships by establishing the scholarship board and finding other sources of financial assistance. In addition, the center guided some students to internship programs and employment opportunities. The latter was a challenging process due to the complexity associated with undocumented students who can work and those who are not eligible, and the different criteria for internships for which some students do not qualify. The center also hosted fundraising programs throughout the year including an annual 5k race and an art auction. Funds from these programs were used to provide emergency grants to students in need. Students were grateful to the USRC because of its concerted efforts to help them find financial resources to pay for college and college-related expenses.

In addition to providing information, workshops, and programming to help students pay for college, the USRC assisted students who were struggling academically by establishing tutoring services and a mentoring program. Furthermore, the USRC encouraged students to explore post-baccalaureate opportunities and supported the aspirations of those students who wanted to pursue a program beyond the bachelor's degree. One of the events hosted by the center specifically geared to promote master's programs was the Grad School Conference. At this event, students had the opportunity to hear from other undocumented grads, find resources to pay for graduate school, and learn about the graduate application process.

Alleviating Fear

It is well documented in the literature, that undocumented students and their families experience a high level of fear due to their immigration status (Abrego, 2011; Aguilar, 2018; Pérez et al., 2010). This was certainly the case for many of the participants in the study. Students expressed that the fear instilled in them from an early age by their family members stayed with them for years. Disclosing their undocumented identity and fear of deportation were the two prevalent fears experienced by the participants. Because of these fears, some participants remained silent about their status throughout high school. Even after arriving at Westside University, some participants expressed their hesitation in disclosing their status. It was not until they visited the USRC and

met with the staff that they felt comfortable revealing their immigration status openly.

To alleviate the fears expressed by the student participants, the USRC sponsored several events where students talked among each other about the challenges their status brings to their daily lives. Participants also spoke about programs hosted by the center aimed at providing them with critical information about their immigrant rights and tips on what to do in the event of a raid. These programs helped students to develop courage and confidence. They learned that they were not alone and that the center provided them with a wealth of knowledge, support, and validation, which aligns with Undocu Crit. As noted previously, the main objective of Undocucrit is to “validate and honor the experiences and identities of our undocumented communities” (Aguilar, 2018 p. 157).

Fostering Acompañamiento

As mentioned previously, acompañamiento refers to the creation of knowledge that is “accessible and relatable” (Aguilar, 2018, p. 157.) to the experiences of undocumented communities. It represents “mentorship, academic redemption, and community engagement” (Aguilar, 2018, p. 153). The Undocumented Student Resource Center helped students realize their goals by fostering a sense of belonging, providing networking opportunities, and helping students establish relationships with institutional agents, peers, and allies. In doing so, undocumented students learned the intricacies of navigating their

college journey. A signature event hosted by USRC and the undocumented students' student organization, which illustrated how the center fosters *acompañamiento*, was the Undocumented Student Recognition Ceremony. This program recognized graduating students. To promote the recognition ceremony, the center posted daily announcements with a countdown to the event. Every day, the post reflected a different picture of previous ceremonies showing students wearing their cap and gown, family members hugging their graduates, students smiling, and others teary-eyed. This event is the culmination of the students' college experience. However, it is also more than that. It is a reflection of their persistence, resilience, and pride. It is a representation of the *acompañamiento* from their families, their peers, and the community.

Promoting Agency and Advocacy

The USRC's agency and advocacy efforts provided a platform for undocumented students to feel confident and not ashamed of their immigration status. Some student participants in the study relayed their involvement in marches organized by the center and the solidarity demonstrated by campus and community members when the new U.S. administration took office and later when DACA was rescinded. The center also collaborated with other universities and political figures to host other events centered on providing students and families with historical knowledge on the evolution of immigration legislation, demonstrating that they were not alone and that there were other people going through the same experiences. They provided hope in that even if DACA were to

be rescinded, they would find support to move forward. Because of the support, warm and welcoming environment, and services provided by the USRC, students felt a sense of belonging, developed a stronger sense of self-efficacy, and created community. In turn, students became advocates for others and engaged in additional agentic behaviors such as sharing their stories, standing up for themselves, and speaking up against inequities.

Post-Baccalaureate Education and Career Choice

Student participants expressed their gratitude for the assistance and encouragement they received from the center's staff regarding graduate school and potential career opportunities upon graduation. The USRC countered invalidating experiences and contexts at WU. As depicted in Chapter Four, some student participants were discouraged when they encountered ill-informed individuals who had pre-conceived ideas about undocumented students. Specifically, situations with students who were challenged, ridiculed, and dismissed by faculty in the classroom or by staff when they sought assistance regarding graduate school.

To diminish the negative impact of these microaggressions and provide students with a support system, the USRC collaborated with internal and external constituents. For example, the USRC partnered with the graduate office to host the annual Graduate School Conference where students learned about the process to apply to graduate school, ways to finance their education, and most importantly, hear the stories of other undocumented graduate students. In

collaboration with Career Services, the USRC conducted a resume and internship search session specific to undocumented students. This session provided students with the opportunity to gain an understanding of how to prepare their resumes, explore internship opportunities, and learn about internship awards offered by Career Services. Furthermore, this session helped students connect with the staff from Career Services and at the same build on their existing social capital. Finally, in attempts to eradicate the distorted view some people have about undocumented communities, the USRC offered undocu ally trainings. The trainings provide participants with a learning opportunity so that they gain a better understanding of the undocumented student population and find ways to support them.

As previously stated, the USRC provided undocumented students with a wide range of services from the start of their college career to graduation and beyond. Based on the data collected in the study, the USRC is of crucial educational, informational, and social value to students, the institution, and the region.

Ultimately, the findings of this study align with and support UndocuCrit (Aguilar, 2018), especially, as it relates to the fear and acompañamiento tenets. As previously stated, participants expressed the fear they felt about disclosing their immigration status and fear of deportation for themselves and their families. In some cases, fear prevented them from taking advantage of their DACA benefits, and thus continued to remain in the shadows. At the same time,

despite the multitude of challenges undocumented students encountered, they found support, encouragement, and a sense of belonging at the USRC and among their peers. The Undocumented Student Resource Center at WU has put in place practices that align with the four tenets of UndocuCrit by collaborating with stakeholders. In alignment with the second tenet of UndocuCrit categorized as “different experiences”, the USRC established writing groups so undocumented students could share their experiences including the mental and physical strain they experience due to their immigration status. Although student participants did not specifically mention the sacrificios their parents made, I witnessed such sacrificios during my observations at the family welcome and orientation program as well as the parent engagement session. During these events, parents expressed their gratitude because they themselves did not have those opportunities but wanted a better life for their children. Finally, the USRC fostered acompañamiento and a sense of belonging by providing students with a warm and welcoming environment where they could feel safe. The USRC also hosted welcome day and orientation programs to embrace and build relationships with new students and their families. The ways in which the findings of this study align with Undocumented Critical Theory (UndocuCrit) and related USRC practices are outlined in the Undocu Strategies Figure 1 below.

In the next section, I present recommendations for institutions, recommendations for educational leaders, suggestions for future research, and conclusion.

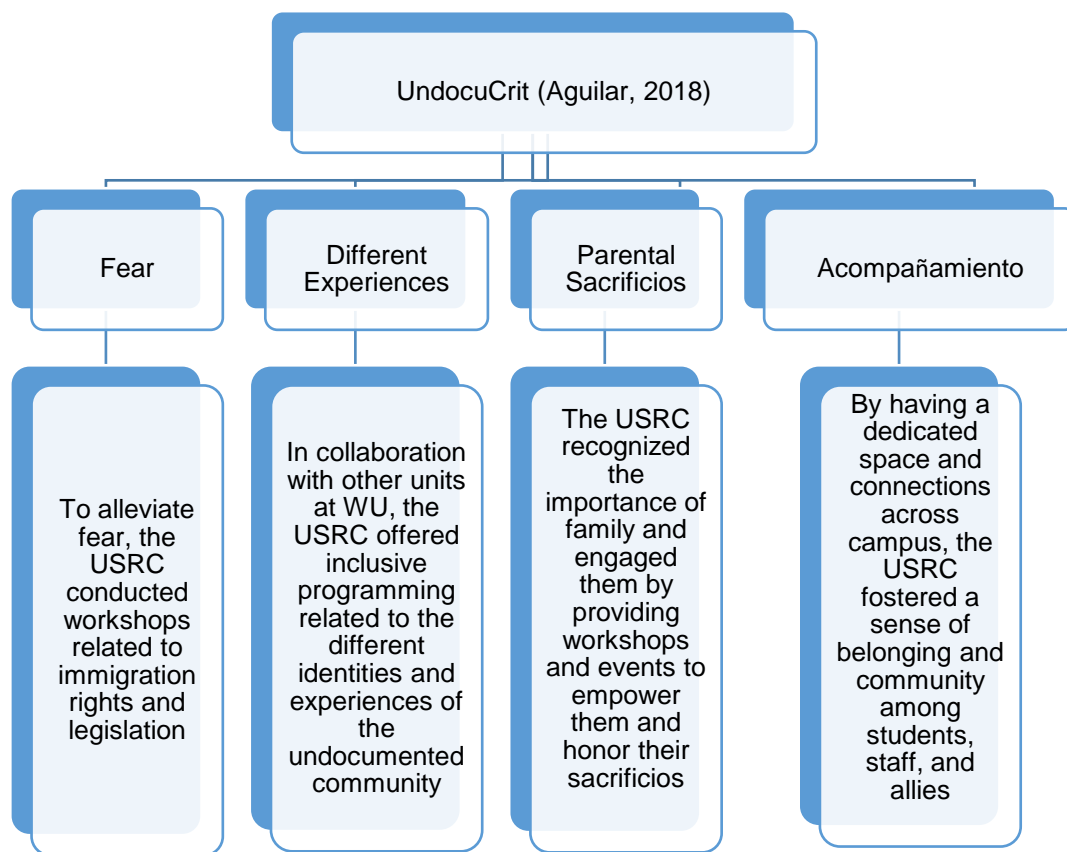


Figure 1. Undocu Strategies.

Recommendations for Institutions of Higher Education

Because of the challenges undocumented students encounter related to accessing college, finding ways to pay for it, and their unique needs, it is important for institutions to create infrastructures, establish practices, and provide additional support so the undocumented student population can thrive. Below, I describe strategies institutions can implement to ensure students feel welcomed and supported from the time they enroll at the university through graduation. The

recommendations for institutions include: provide adequate space; advance a compassionate and knowledgeable staff; listen to student voices; offer financial support; make ally trainings mandatory; administer intentional advising; offer relevant programming; foster acompañamiento; and promote services and visibility. The recommendations for educational leaders include: participating in ally trainings; providing support; and staying informed. Suggestions for future research include: additional research on USRCs; inclusion of more male participants; and a study on the retention and graduation of undocumented students.

Space Matters

Based on the findings of this study, it is clear that space matters. Participants undoubtedly agreed that having a space where they can socialize, build community, and seek assistance, gave them a sense of belonging. They praised WU for establishing a dedicated space for them, and overall, they felt welcomed, validated and seen. Sense of belonging is instrumental to student persistence and retention (Pérez et al., 2009; Villegas & Villegas, 2019). As such, it is critically important that colleges and universities establish undocumented student resource centers. This includes allocating adequate space to meet students' needs. The space should allow for collaboration and connection, as well as privacy. The location of the allocated space is of utmost importance. While the majority of participants felt comfortable visiting the USRC in its current, visible location, several students shared that the center's current

location adds to the fear of disclosing their undocumented identity. One possible solution to address this valid concern would be for the center to have more than one entrance – one less visible or exposed than the other. Furthermore, it is important that institutions allocate adequate permanent funding to staff USRCs and enhance the services provided to undocumented students. This institutional commitment requires more than one-time startup funds, which often impede sustainable efforts.

Compassionate and Knowledgeable Staff

In order for undocumented students to build relationships and develop connections, institutions must hire competent staff members who are knowledgeable, dedicated, and specialize in working with this student population. During the hiring process, diversity statements should be reviewed for a commitment to undocumented students, among other student populations. In addition, there is a critical need for more diverse leaders, committed to issues of social justice and equity, who represent the student population and community they serve. Furthermore, institutions must ensure that existing staff are trained and are equipped to assist and support undocumented students. Having compassionate and knowledgeable staff who genuinely care about and understand the experiences of this student population will help foster a sense of belonging within the institution.

Listen to Their Voice

Equally important, is the need for institutions to listen to students' voices and learn about their experiences inside and outside of the classroom. This could be accomplished by conducting focus groups, holding open forums, and seeking student participation through clubs and organizations and inviting on-campus residents and affinity centers. In addition, institutions should include students in the decision-making process such as seeking their involvement in staff and faculty hiring and soliciting their participation in campus-wide committees. Paying attention to what students have to say provides institutions with the foundation to take action and tailor services to meet the needs of this student population. Most importantly, it will demonstrate institutions' commitment to honor and fully include undocumented students into the campus environment.

Providing Financial Support

Given the financial barriers undocumented students encounter, it is essential that institutions provide funding to assist students pay for college. Funding can be in the form of scholarships, opening up alternative funding for students to participate in internships, fellowships, and facilitating employment opportunities. Providing financial support not only provides undocumented students with learning opportunities to build skills and enter the workforce upon graduation, but it also speaks volumes about the institution's commitment to help students thrive. These opportunities can alleviate some of the financial challenges undocumented students encounter; however, as noted above, it is

imperative that institutions provide permanent funding to support these efforts. As indicated by the majority of the participants in the study, the lack of financial assistance in the form of grants, internships and employment create a great level of stress, which often hinders their academic progress. Although the USRC's fundraising efforts are noteworthy, the sustainability of the center should not depend on these small-scale efforts.

Mandatory Ally Trainings

Instituting mandatory ally trainings for faculty, staff, and administrators are aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the undocumented community. They are also intended to promote diversity and create a campus where inclusion is a key component of a campus' culture. Ally trainings can be valuable components of professional development programs. To ensure participation, ally trainings should occur during faculty and staff orientation programs throughout the year and can be made available in person or online. It is important to note that ally trainings cannot be successful unless institutions make a concerted effort to require all faculty, staff, and administrators to attend and complete the training (The DREAM U.S., 2019). In addition to demonstrating institutions' commitment to undocumented students, ally trainings can inform staff, faculty, and administrators with the most effective strategies to enact policies and procedures that can better serve the undocumented community. To be clear, trainings should not be a one-time event and should involve both reflection and reflexivity. Carefully thought out activities and an asset-based

approach might help temper some of the opposition compulsory trainings are likely to evoke. Framing of such trainings matters.

Intentional Advising

To facilitate graduation, institutions should design a roadmap or clear pathway from the point of interest to graduation so that students know where they are in terms of their progress to degree at any time. Once enrolled, students need comprehensive support services to remain in school, persist, and graduate in a timely fashion. As stated by several student participants the services provided by the peer mentors at the USRC assisted them with their academic plans, guided them about what classes they needed to take, and supported them with tutoring services when they experienced academic challenges. Although these support services are offered outside of the center, offering them tailored and within the USRC appeared to have a greater impact on student participants and their persistence. This finding aligns with other studies on this student population in that undocumented students benefit from specialized services (Chen et al., 2010; Contreras, 2009; Pérez, 2010; Pérez & Rodriguez, 2012). Additionally, students perform better, make stronger connections and develop a higher level of comfort when staff who understand their experiences (Cisneros & Valdivia, 2018; Pérez, 2010; Pérez & Rodriguez, 2012) provide these services.

Relevant Programming

Colleges and universities should create programs that genuinely and intentionally welcome and validate undocumented students and their families

such as welcome day, orientation programs, financial aid workshops, and parent engagement programs. In addition, campuses need to survey undocumented students to find out what are the pressing issues they are facing and find ways to address them. To help inform and improve student services, program assessment is needed.

Fostering Acompañamiento

In order to foster acompañamiento, colleges and universities should designate and educate staff in key areas including admissions, financial aid, housing, and career services to serve as liaisons so undocumented students are not bounced around when needing assistance. This ensures they receive accurate and relevant information. Providing points of contact in key departments promotes a sense of acompañamiento and relieves some of the anxiety undocumented students experience when people do not know how to help them.

Promote Service and Visibility

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that colleges and universities publicize their commitment to working with undocumented students and their families. Specifically, I recommend posting information clearly on their university website and recruitment materials. This approach acknowledges the undocumented student population, directs them to services available to them, and makes them feel welcomed. However, publicizing information should go beyond websites and printed material. Institutions need dedicated resources to

promote their commitment to the undocumented community. In turn, this commitment should guide allocation of funding to promote visibility, demonstrate support, and expand services. Ultimately, institutions should be places that celebrate differences and build a sense of community for all.

In sum, post-secondary institutions have the opportunity to be key players in promoting college access, providing a welcoming environment, and supporting undocumented students to degree completion and beyond.

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

Educational leaders inclusive of faculty, staff, and administrators, play a key role in the school trajectory of undocumented students. Educational leaders have the responsibility to support, encourage, and listen to the undocumented student population. As such, it is imperative that they are informed, knowledgeable, and have the courage to check the biases and assumptions guiding their work. They need to be willing to serve all students in their schools. Below are recommendations for educational leaders. These recommendations align with those advanced for colleges and universities, in such cases where the institutions themselves are not committed to serving undocumented students.

Ally Training

Even if not mandatory, educational leaders should participate in ally trainings in order to build relationships with and create a warm, welcoming, and validating environment for undocumented students. They should also consider attending other forms of professional development opportunities such as

conferences specific to undocumented communities and join ally and advocacy networks.

Providing Support

It is important for educational leaders to be aware of the needs of undocumented students so they can provide adequate support when students seek their assistance. In addition to establishing an undocumented student center or finding out if such a center exists, educational leaders need to make connections with staff in Counseling, Health Services, Financial Aid, Career Services and Housing in order to be able to support and refer students as needed. After attending ally trainings, they should have a sign on their doors or office indicating they are allies. Finally, a statement about the services available to undocumented students by the USRC (if one exists) or other entity should be included in their syllabi or in their office spaces. This statement can resemble those increasingly used to notify students who face food, housing and basic needs insecurity about whom to contact for support.

Staying Informed

As previously mentioned, immigration legislation is constantly changing. Therefore, educational leaders including counselors, student services professionals and advisors, need to stay informed and be current on immigration policies and legislation. In addition to participating in ally trainings, educational leaders should attend webinars, conferences, and information sessions regarding undocumented students and ways they can serve this population better.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings in this study provide an understanding of the role the Undocumented Student Resource Center plays as undocumented students navigate their college journey at WU. Based on the findings, the following are areas to be considered for future research. Given the scarce amount of literature on Undocumented Student Resource Centers, it is highly recommended that additional research with a larger sample of USRCs be conducted to build support systems that are more comprehensive for undocumented students both at the community college and university level. Also, as mentioned previously, of the fourteen students who participated in the study, only two were male. Thus, it would be beneficial for similar studies to aim for greater male participation. Additionally, studies that focus on undocumented students' retention and graduation is highly recommended, as there is not sufficient research on this topic. This could be a more in-depth study that investigates the significance of the services and support provided by USRCs. Finally, additional research should explore university-wide and community collaborations with USRCs with the goal of supporting undocumented students.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I highlighted the implications and findings of the study and provided recommendations for institutions of higher education, educational leaders, and suggestions for future research. The participants' narratives highlighted the importance of Undocumented Student Resource Centers

(USRCs) as spaces that foster a sense of belonging and a welcoming place where they feel safe and at home. In some instances, students provided specific examples as to how the USRC was the main reason they chose to attend Westside University (WU). In other instances, they shared the challenges and opportunities they encountered during their college trajectory both inside and outside of the classroom. Finally, participants shared the ways in which the USRC has supported and advocated for them. The hope is that this research study serves as a resource for those interested in establishing dedicated spaces for undocumented students and that it contributes to the existing but scarce literature on Undocumented Student Research Centers (USRCs).

Given the findings of this study, as educators, it is critically important that we treat undocumented students with dignity and respect regardless of what our stance is on immigration. As educators, we have an incredible opportunity to be change agents and to express compassion, love, and understanding for this student population. The time is now to show undocumented students unconditional support. As an educator, I believe that we should follow the lead of undocumented students across the country and be unafraid and unapologetic. We all have an opportunity to learn from and value the contributions of the undocumented community. I believe we need to stand up against inequities and prejudice towards undocumented students, their families and their communities. I firmly believe that positive change begins with each one of us and we manifest it with our actions. I believe we need to breakdown barriers and build bridges so

that undocumented students like Jaime feel like they are in “paradise”, so that they “feel at home”...in every space they occupy.

APPENDIX A
STUDENT PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLIER

Seeking Volunteers for Research Study



Are you an Undocumented Student at Westside University (WU) or a recent WU graduate?

Would you like to assist a doctoral candidate with their research project?

- Participation consists of one 30-45 minute interview
- Your identity and all information will be kept confidential
- This research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- If interested, please call or text XXX-XXX-XXXX.

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APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

“Understanding The Role of Undocumented Student Resource Centers as Undocumented Students Navigate their College Journey.”

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PURPOSE: Under the supervision of Dr. Edna Martinez, dissertation chair, Ms. Rosa Olivia Rosas, doctoral student and researcher at California State University, San Bernardino invites you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand the role of Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs) in undocumented students' college journey. The Institutional Review Board at California State University, San Bernardino, has approved this study.

Expected results include an understanding of how the USRC and its services influence the experiences of undocumented students, if at all. This research project aims to provide insights for colleges to establish USRCs and implement practices to create an undocufriendly campus. It also intends to provide institutions with recommendations to assist undocumented students matriculate, remain in school, and graduate. Finally, this study aims to contribute to existing but limited literature on Undocumented Student Resource Centers.

DESCRIPTION: I would like to ask you to participate in an interview. Your participation will require approximately 30-45 minutes. The interviews will be conducted in a format of your preference including face-to-face, via telephone, or face-to-face remote conversation using Zoom. Additionally, the time and location of the interview will be scheduled at your convenience. With your permission, all interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. I will rely on a secure transcription service to help transcribe the interviews. If you prefer that I transcribe your interview, I will transcribe your interview.

I will also conduct observations at the Undocumented Student Resource Center during tutoring sessions, writing circles, parent workshops and Family Welcome Day. These observations will help me understand the services and opportunities the Center offers as well as how they engage students and families.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study and you are not obligated to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Furthermore, you may withdraw your participation in the study at any time without penalty.

PAYMENT AND COMPENSATION: Participants will not receive any type of payment or compensation for their participation.

CONFIDENTIAL: I will do everything to protect your confidentiality. Your identity will not be revealed in any dissemination of the study (e.g., articles and presentations). Both you and your college will be assigned a fictitious name. In addition to using fictitious names, all identifying information will be further disguised. Lastly, in efforts to protect confidentiality any data collected will be kept under lock and key and in password protected computer file. The audio recordings will be destroyed 3 years after the project has ended. With your permission, all interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. I will rely on a secure transcription service to help transcribe the interviews. If you prefer that I transcribe your interview, I will do the interview transcription.

DURATION: Your participation in the study will consist of one interview. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. I may contact you via e-mail or telephone following the interview, with follow-up or clarifying questions. This exchange may not require more than ten minutes of your time.

RISKS: I do not know of any risks to you in this research study. However, answering questions about your experiences may cause some discomfort. As noted previously, you may opt out from answering any questions or withdraw from participating at any time during the course of the study. Furthermore, your name and your institution will not be identifiable by name during the study or after its completion.

BENEFITS: I am not aware of any benefits you may receive from participating in this study. However, the information you share through your participation in this study will contribute to a better understanding of the role of the USRC and the experiences of undocumented students.

AUDIO: I understand that the interview for this study will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy of interview notes Initials_____

CONTACT: If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Dr. Edna Martinez at emartinez@csusb.edu or 909.537.5676. You may also contact California State University, San Bernardino's Institutional Review Board Compliance Officer, Michael Gillespie at mgillesp@csusb.edu or 909.537.7588.

RESULTS: I intent to present the results of my research by submitting proposals to local, regional and national conferences in K-16 settings. I will also look for opportunities to share my research at teacher-training programs, staff development sessions, and with community organizations. In addition, I will seek publishing opportunities in educational journals; and I will publish my dissertation.

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:

I have read the information above and agree to participate in your study.

SIGNATURE:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT RESOURCE
CENTER STAFF

Interview Questions – For Undocumented Student Resource Center (USRC)
Staff

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. What led to the establishment of the USRC?
3. How would you describe your experience working at the USRC?
4. What is the role of the USRC on campus?
5. What has been your experience with the staff, faculty and students at your institution?
6. How would you describe your institution's commitment to support undocumented students?
7. How is your institution addressing the unique needs of undocumented students?
8. What do you see as potential barriers that may hinder the persistence of undocumented students?
9. As institutional agent, how do you raise awareness about the undocumented student population?
10. How do you go about obtaining institutional support for undocumented students?
11. What recommendations or action steps can your institution take to provide support to undocumented students?
12. If you could offer any recommendations to colleges and universities about how to support undocumented students, what would some of those recommendations be?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Interview Questions – For Student Participants

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. How did you decide to come to school here?
3. How would you describe your undergraduate experience at this institution?
4. What opportunities have you had as an undocumented student in school?
5. What challenges do you face as an undocumented student in school?
6. How would you describe the USRC?
7. How would you describe your institution's commitment to support undocumented students?
8. If you could offer any recommendations to colleges and universities about how to support undocumented students, what would some of those recommendations be?
9. What has been your experience with the staff, faculty and students at your institution?
10. How is your institution addressing the unique needs of undocumented students?
11. How do undocumented students make use of USRC to navigate their college journey?
12. What advice would you give other undocumented students?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ALLIES

Interview Questions - For Allies

1. Please tell me what your role is at the institution.
2. What role do you see the USRC play in undocumented students' college experience?
3. How do you describe your involvement with the USRC?
4. How would you describe your institution's commitment to support undocumented students?
5. How is your institution addressing the unique needs of undocumented students?
6. As institutional agent, how do you raise awareness about the undocumented student population?
7. What recommendations or action steps can your institution take to provide support to undocumented students?

APPENDIX F
EMAIL INVITATION

E-mail Invitation

May 2019

Dear (Name of Potential Participant),

My name is Olivia Rosas and I am a doctoral candidate at California State University, San Bernardino. I am writing to invite you to participate in the research study I will be conducting on your campus this summer. The title of the study is "Understanding the Role of Undocumented Student Resource Centers as Undocumented Students Navigate their College Journey." The main purpose of the study is to explore the role Undocumented Student Resource Centers (USRCs) play in the college journey of undocumented students.

Attached to this email are the details of this research study including the recruitment flier and informed consent form. If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview regarding your college experience as it relates to the role of Undocumented Student Resource Centers. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be conducted at a location, time and format most convenient to you.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at olivia.rosas23@gmail.com.

Takes in advance for your time and participation.

Olivia Rosas

APPENDIX G
RECRUITMENT FLIER FOR ALLIES

Seeking Research Participants!

Do you consider yourself an Ally of undocumented students at Westside University?

Are you a faculty, staff or administrator at Westside University?

Would you like to assist a doctoral candidate with their research project?

- Participation consists of one 30-45 minute interview
- Your identity and all information will be kept confidential
- This research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Olivia.rosas23@gmail.com

Olivia.rosas23@gmail.com

Olivia.rosas23@gmail.com

Olivia.rosas23@gmail.com

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APPENDIX H
DEFINITION OF TERMS

Definition of Terms

Allies – “individuals who work from a position of authority, power, or influence to impact others’ lives positively by challenging systems of oppression” (Broido, 2000; Washington & Evans, 1991) as cited by Chen and Rhoads (2016, p. 517). Assembly Bill 540 (AB540)

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) – an immigration policy that provides eligible undocumented people relief from deportation, temporary social security numbers, driver’s license and renewable work permits. However, it does not provide a path to citizenship (Gonzales et al., 2014).

Development, Relief for Education of Alien Minors (DREAM) Act – This proposed legislation would have provided a pathway for undocumented students who met certain criteria to gain lawful immigration status in the United States, be able to legally work, and be eligible for state and federal financial aid (Ruge & Iza 2005).

Institutional Agent – “high-status, non-kin, agents who occupy relatively high positions in the multiple dimensional stratification system, and who are well positioned to provide key forms of social and institutional support” (Stanton-Salazar, p. 1066).

Plyler v. Doe – the U.S. Supreme Court ruling stating that undocumented children could attend K-12 public schools without regard to their immigration status (Olivas, 2012).

Undocumented Immigrant – According to the National Immigration Law Center (n.d.), an undocumented immigrant is someone born outside of the United States (U.S.) who may have entered the country on a visa but overstayed its timeframe; or someone who came to this country with fraudulent documentation or no documentation at all.

APPENDIX I
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



August 29, 2019

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Protocol Change/Modification

IRB-FY2019-286

Status: Approved

Ms. Rosa Rosas and Prof. Edna Martinez
COE - Doctoral Studies
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Ms. Rosas and Prof. Martinez:

The protocol change/modification to your application to use human subjects, titled "Understanding The Role of Undocumented Resource Centers As Undocumented Students Navigate Their College Journey" has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). A change in your informed consent requires resubmission of your protocol as amended. Please ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following by submitting the appropriate form (modification, unanticipated/adverse event, renewal, study closure) through the online Cayuse IRB Submission System.

- 1. If you need to make any changes/modifications to your protocol submit a modification form as the IRB must review all changes before implementing in your study to ensure the degree of risk has not changed.**
- 2. If any unanticipated adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research study or project.**
- 3. If your study has not been completed submit a renewal to the IRB.**
- 4. If you are no longer conducting the study or project submit a study closure.**

You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three

years.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application identification number (above) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Donna Garcia

Donna Garcia, Ph.D, IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

DG/MG

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